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The city and the citizen: shifts in Argentine national identity through the contested spatial production of Buenos Aires 1880-1955

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The City and the Citizen:

*Shifts in Argentine national identity through the contested spatial production of Buenos Aires
1880-1955*

Michael Zajakowski Uhl

April 28th, 2017

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

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Introduction:

How do people change their world?

“Essentially, we are fighting for a world where everyone, especially workers, can live a dignified life,”¹ Daniela Rodriguez tells me over coffee one evening in October of 2015. Daniela is a member of el Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (MOI), a housing justice organization in Buenos Aires, Argentina that seeks to provide living spaces for working class people displaced by neoliberal housing policy, and I am interviewing her for a project on housing reform movements in the city.

“We are fighting for the right to the city, which means we are seeking material and concrete gains, as well as naming that the popular sectors have, historically and presently, been expelled from Buenos Aires,” she continues. “We need to make people realize they have a right to live with dignity, no matter their class.”

“Living with dignity” is an idea I came across often during my investigation into contemporary housing movements while studying abroad in Argentina during the Fall of 2015. It captured the sense that there is more to life than just being alive; that what activists are fighting against is the normalization that some lives are unquestionably worth more than others; that powerful and wealthy people are able to have disproportionate effects on the livelihoods of those with less power or less money. Maxo Velazquez, a professor of urban planning at the University of Buenos Aires, explained that “access is more than just physically living in the city, it is also

¹ I utilize three interviews in the introduction, all of which took place in November 2015 and with various members of Buenos Aires civil and political society. The information for these interviews, as well as the original Spanish transcripts, are located in the appendix to this work.

social access, economic access, and cultural access....people need to have the liberty to live how they want.”

The academics and activists I interviewed, including Daniela and Maxo, believed in a vision of the city where simply a right to live is not enough. People must have the ability to create and control their own spaces, politically, socially, and culturally: what sociologist Henri Lefebvre calls “the right to the city.” “The right to the city” essentially advocates for a vision of the city and society that is produced, designed, and maintained by the actual inhabitants of a space. The normative power of capitalism, according to Lefebvre, is reliant on and defined by how capital is absorbed and conglomerated within certain spaces at different historical temporalities.² Cities, like Buenos Aires, have traditionally been the physical manifestation of this capital accumulation, and as Marxist Urbanist David Harvey explains, “urbanization has played a crucial role in this absorption of capital surpluses, at ever increasing geographical scales, but at the price of burgeoning processes of creative destruction that have dispossessed the masses of any right to the city whatsoever.”³ Historically, then, the power to create cities has rested in the hands of the state and allied bourgeois capitalist interests, or those who have the most access to the benefits of capital accumulation. Urbanism and city planning have generally been top-down endeavors, “restricted in most cases to a small political and economic elite who are in a position to shape cities more and more after their own desires”⁴ rather than the desires of the people who actually inhabit the city. The “right to the city” seeks to place the power to shape physical surroundings into the hands of the lived inhabitants of a space; it seeks to create dignified lives.

² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 241.

³ David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *The New Left Review* 53, (2008): 37.

⁴ Ibid., 38.

But how does “the right to the city” actually manifest? How do people or groups work to realize it? MOI, Daniela explained to me, utilizes a model of “self-management” (autogestion), in which members of the organization occupy abandoned buildings and create their own autonomous communities which include housing, food co-ops, small-scale factories, and schools. Mercedes Di Virigilio, a professor at the Instituto de Investigaciones at the University of Buenos Aires told me that she believes the right to the city can be realized through “the reoccupation of central areas of the city by the working class; to live and to work.” Velazquez, in his interview, stated that “subaltern quotidian practices that seek to gain [increased] access...like protests, or militant agitation,” were some of the ways in which people could begin to exert a right to the city.

The “right to the city” and its realization, then, are incredibly spatially oriented. The claims to the city are made through and on space; the activists and academics I interviewed all understood “claiming” the right to the city as manifest through spatial practices that oppose the current hegemonic imaginings of who is able to live with dignity within the city; Daniela and Di Virigilio both emphasize “occupation,” while Velazquez discusses protest, implying a grassroots, street-level and spatially defined resistance. The struggle for the right to the city happens in parks, intended for calm, urbane, and aesthetic consumption, that become campgrounds for the homeless at night, or in the thoroughfare, intended to facilitate the smooth transportation of capital, that is blocked by protestors holding signs that bring attention to their plight. Indeed, Geographer Don Mitchell puts it quite simply when he says “representation, whether of oneself or a group, demands space.”⁵ For groups such as MOI, who, as Daniela tells me, often have

⁵ Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (London: The Guilford Press, 2003), 33.

trouble articulating their demands through formal political channels due to their radical nature, space is often the only tool they have to resist.

Occupations of space can then bring attention to issues within the political sphere, and the realization of the “right to the city” has the potential to be articulated on an institutional level. Daniela suggests in her interview that the way MOI has tended to gauge their successes is in terms of “the depth with which social movements who seek to realize the right to the city [infiltrate] the state.” Daniela and MOI recognize that the nation-state holds the power of legitimacy and, regardless of individual members’ views on the ideal role (or lack of role) of the state in society, they practice a politics of immediacy that seeks to “become the action of the state, in favor of our own interests...the public policies we bring through the state must be the most democratic that they can be.” Many social movements in Argentina, including MOI, view the state as “a space of dispute” where various interests contest their beliefs about the potential future of the nation.

Through these conversations and interactions, I began to get a sense of the way space plays into very different realities for various political actors, social groups, and lived subjectivities. The role of social movements has historically been to poke holes in oppressive hegemonies and challenge what we often view as “common sense” - in this case our given notions on the usage and production of space. The social movement actors I met with, in challenging the dominant conceptions of spatial practice in Buenos Aires, were actively rejecting the bio-political power of the state to, as Foucault famously states, “make live and let die” according to its own capitalistic whims. Through their participation in social movements, the organizers were refusing the power of the state to “make” them live as consenting participants in

a capitalist system. The pressure social movements exert through space can then influence and change the workings of the state itself, as the ebbs and flows of power shift between legitimization and de-legitimization of social movements and facilitate their incorporation into or exclusion from formal political discourse.

This train of thought quickly began to inform the intellectual path within my abroad experience. How do these social movements and their actors articulate the way they envision and interact with their spatial viewpoints in a way that contrasts the intended use defined by the state? How does a certain space concede or produce the power to define, govern, and mold a group identity? What happens if said group rejects this power? How does the state morph to meet or repress these demands? These questions altered the way I viewed the landscape I inhabited. Mitchell notes that our common sense idea of space in its present form “tends to conceptualize entities in terms of substance rather than process or relation. But a more dialectical notion of entities can be adopted, struggled for, and defended.”⁶ I began to see the city of Buenos Aires as the product of these processes and struggles and as the built manifestation of shifting power structures and social conflicts.

I was inspired by MOI’s ability to make “the right to the city” a reality within the parts of the city they occupied, especially the way in which they combatted hegemonic narratives about the normative nature of space. However, MOI had only been in operation since the early 1980’s. After my initial report was complete, I found I was still curious about the deeper history of these spatial politics in Buenos Aires. As an urban historian, my continual question persisted “How did we get to this point? Why is the city the way it is now?”

⁶ Mitchell, 36.

This thesis seeks to address some of these fundamental questions. I examine the ways the power to define urban space and realize “the right to the city” shifted in metropolitan Buenos Aires from roughly 1880-1950. I utilize this time frame to present a historiography that complements my previous works on MOI and contemporary housing movements in Buenos Aires, and provide a base for understanding the dynamics between Argentine civil society and political society in the present context. Specifically, I outline the transition from oligarchic political rule through the first decades of the twentieth century, and the ways in which the state in this period utilized spatial productions to reinscribe the formation of Argentina as a cosmopolitan, modern capitalist state, to the oppositional spatial tactics utilized by the various anarchist and socialist groups of the era to combat bourgeois hegemony, and finally how these spatial strategies paved the way for the collapse of the oligarchic order and the eventual rise of the Peronist state, which continued to use spatial production as a means of exerting power and influence. I gauge this transition through the lens of national identity formation, and measure the success of social movements infiltrating the political sphere by examining the shift from an official national identity of bourgeois cosmopolitanism to the strong emphasis on the worker as ideal Argentine citizen under Perón.

Contested spatial geographies are incredibly complex and convoluted in the everyday interactions between place, people, and power, and it is impossible to capture and define the multiple subjectivities and contexts that constitute spatial production. Space is never apolitical, and is manifested in the continual power shifts between the actors that seek to define it. I believe that this understanding of the built environment, as defined through its relation to struggle, inherently opens up room to imagine alternative political and social landscapes as part of this

struggle, and gives groups or individuals the rhetorical resources to mobilize this imaginary into reality.

Theoretical Frameworks:

Marx/The Right to the City:

This thesis will utilize a Marxist framework, rooted in the idea of class conflict, to serve as a measure for the sorts of social change that can be influenced by shifts in the control of spatial productions. Although this framework can very often be class-reductive, it is useful in analyzing larger paradigm shifts in terms of ownership of the means of production; economic, spatial, cultural, etc. The “right to the city,” is a Marxist framework based around the idea of spatial production, and thus is utilized as the main theoretical framework in this thesis to show how working class Argentines in Buenos Aires were able to exert more control over the production of an Argentine national identity as they articulated their demands through spatial tactics, and how these tactics played a large role in Perón’s ultimate rise to power.

Right to the City/Abstract Space/Lived Space:

The normative power of banks, the bureaucratic state, and corporations in urban areas are characterized within this framework as an example of what Lefebvre refers to as “abstract space, or the externalization of economic and political practices originating with the capitalist class and the state.”⁷ This is in contrast to “lived space” or “social space,” the space that consists of the interactions of everyday life. The “right to the city” advocates for cities in which the social

⁷ Lefebvre, 23.

distance between these abstract and lived spaces is lessened, where those who occupy the lived space of an urban area have the right to define and control the institutions that affect their lives and landscapes.

I incorporate the “right to the city” in this thesis to provide the base framework for examining the shifts in conceptions of Argentine national identity throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The contested spatial productions that facilitated the transition from a Bourgeois, internationally oriented state to the working class, Peronist state can be defined as one interpretation of a “right to the city,” where the ruling bourgeois classes during the early free market era represent normative “abstract” spatial productions, and the rise of working class political power represents a lessening of the distance between “abstract space” and the actual “lived space” of the typical Buenos Aires inhabitant.

Abstract Space/Lived Space - Civil Society/Political Society:

I also connect Lefebvre’s conceptions of “abstract space” and “lived space” to Antonio Gramsci’s notions of political and civil society. The constant mnemonic relationship between abstract and lived space that produces the everyday experiences of those who live within that space is mirrored in Gramsci’s theories of hegemony, which, he claims “results from the organic relations between the State or political society and ‘civil society.’”⁸ Political society, much like abstract space, constitutes the official apparatuses of the state, and the way they are directly able to exert power over the lives of their populace, while civil society constitutes the private and personal spheres of life.⁹ The two sects of society are constantly interacting, in the same way as

⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971): 52.

⁹ Gramsci, 12.

abstract and lived spaces, to create the experience of life under civil and state produced hegemonies. In the context of this thesis, I use these concepts to trace the political trajectory of the Argentine working class and their incorporation into political society under Perón. The bourgeois class of Argentina initially was able to create national hegemonies “because of its position and function in the world of production,”¹⁰ which allowed them to set the standard of national norms in order to receive the “consent” to exert control over the working class. As Gramsci states, “the subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a ‘state’: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society,”¹¹ and in order to oppose the bourgeois hegemony, the Argentine working class had to work outside the bounds of the political society in which they were not yet incorporated.

Mariana Casale O’Ryan, a Latin American Cultural Studies professor from Buenos Aires, argues for this framework in her PhD on the production of space in Buenos Aires: “Lefebvre, commenting on Gramsci, refers to [the] use of social space to maintain the dominance of a hegemonic class, by promoting certain cultural values spatially.”¹² An understanding of the way spatial productions serve to inform hegemony can be used strategically by movements organizing for social change, and in the case of this thesis, the spatial manifestations of civil society/lived space organizing became the venue in which workers disrupted conceptions of bourgeois hegemony until that particular iteration of Argentine national identity was fractured enough that the working classes could seize control of political society/abstract space as well.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12.

¹¹ Ibid., 52.

¹² Mariana Casale O’Ryan, *The Making of Jorge Luis Borges as an Argentine Cultural Icon* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014): 4.

Power and Space:

One of the central tenets of this thesis is the notion that power is manifested in the everyday interactions that constitute our lived space, and, vice versa, that the interactions exercised through space can be a means to accumulating power. The French geographer Michel Riou, drawing from the writings of Michel Foucault, states that power is “the capacity in which a person, a class, or an institution finds them or itself able to make the whole social body evolve to their or its own demands and profit.”¹³ Groups or classes that possess power are more likely to have influence over the trajectory of the spaces they control, and the different branches of power are often intertwined - for example, economic privilege will usually result in having disproportionate sway over cultural production and politics.

Another French geographer, Jean Michel-Brambant, states that “the notion of power must always be brought back to one’s approach to the social organization of which it is the principal organizer,”¹⁴ and in the contemporary context the principal way in which power is organized is through the nation-state. Of course, this is not to say that the only manifestation of power is through the state, indeed, as Foucault states, “society is an archipelago of different powers.”¹⁵ However, examining the ebbs and flows of nationalisms through the lens of state power can be a useful framework, like the class reductionism of Marx, to show larger trends in the continual shifts of power that are often associated with state regime change - such as access to cultural production, economic policy determination, and political power. Foucault argues that “we cannot speak [of power], if we want to do an analysis of power, but we must speak of

¹³ Michel Rou, *Space, Knowledge, and Power: Foucault and Geography*, edited by Jeremy Crampton (New York: Routledge, 2007): 36.

¹⁴ Jean- Michel Brambart, *ibid.*, 26.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, “Meshes of Power” in *Space, Knowledge and Power*.

powers and try to localize them in their historical and geographical specificity.”¹⁶In the case of this thesis and the production of space and national identities in Buenos Aires, examining the ways the state shifted and morphed during the period of inquiry exemplifies larger shifts in power from the middle and bourgeois classes at the beginning of the 20th century to the working class nationalisms that overtook them during the era of Perón. The Argentine state and its apparatuses, then, is used in this context as a legitimator of national power.

National Identity and Spatial Production:

In defining nationalisms throughout this work, I refer mainly to the idea of nationalisms as “imagined communities,” as outlined by historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson in his book of the same name. Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign...because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁷ Through this definition, I attempt to show that the rhetorics of nationalism, particularly imaginings of national identity, are often constructed by groups or classes that are in power and applied to the nation as a whole through various means of cultural, economic, or spatial production - the emphasis of this thesis resting in the spatial aspect. Thinking of nations as “imagined communities,” after all, begs the question of who, and from where, these imaginations are flowing from.

Anderson states that “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political

¹⁶ Foucault, 156.

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 1983): 6.

life of our time,”¹⁸ and the unquestioned hegemony of nation-state formations often serves to obscure power differentials within nations through constructed notions of unity and citizenship. These notions of unity and citizenship are reinscribed by place-making that reflects the goals and aspirations of the group in power. The geographer John Agnew defines place as “a part of the terrestrial surface that is not equivalent to any other, that cannot be exchanged with any other without everything changing.”¹⁹ A sense of place, then, depends on certain defining factors, such as cultural context, shared histories, and designated, bounded territories, that constitute what categorizes the area as a “place” different from other “places.” These defining factors help to formulate a sense of identity that connects people to the place they inhabit, and in turn allows the place to be continually shaped and defined by its inhabitants. In the context of the nation-state, place-associations are primarily influenced at the national scale, and the specificities and details of inhabited place often serve to formulate a national identity. These common thoughts, practices, and factors define a community on the national level, and serve as both a unifying force and aspirational model for those within the territory.

Identities are developed, imposed, and sustained by a variety of practices, indeed, “it is suggested that questions of national identity can be examined through the sorts of social practices that are seen to sustain identities.”²⁰ One such practice is the production of a physical environment that reflects the common and most emphasized tenets of a national identity. Politicians and reformers alike are able to utilize the biopolitical nature of inhabited spaces within a nation-state to influence and cajole its citizens into serving larger national or communal

¹⁸ Anderson, 4.

¹⁹ John Agnew, “Space and Place” in *the Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* (London: Sage Publishing, 2011), 2.

²⁰ Klaus John Dodds, “Geography, Identity and the Creation of the Argentine State,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 12, no. 3 (1993): 314.

projects through laws about the use of public space, beautification projects that serve to announce success or wealth, or specific zoning ordinances that promote certain building practices. For example, in the contemporary context, benches in cities are often divided into seating sections by strategically placed hand rests. While this appears unnoteworthy at first glance, in reality the hand rests serve to prevent homeless people from sleeping on the benches at night. Without blatantly stating its opposition to homeless citizens, the city government is able to control the types of people who are using the bench, and for what. The MTA in New York, for example, utilizes this practice of sectioning benches, and in doing so facilitates the usage of the subway station as a specifically transitory space and not as a place to loiter or sleep.

On a larger scale, these types of physical and coercive practices oftentimes serve to contribute to a particular cultivated national hegemony, a certain idealization of the types of people the state hopes to produce. “Spaces are more than just physical locations - they are imbued with meanings by the people who inhabit and observe them,”²¹ and those individuals or institutions that have more access to political and cultural means of production will exert more power over the projected meanings of certain spaces. Within the context of the modern nation-state, even local spaces are articulated and understood through a larger national hegemony. Thus, the power, spectacle, and politics of the nation state, and those who are in control of the state apparatus, are physically manifested in the infrastructural focuses of the nation’s cities and towns, the types of historic monuments built and dedicated, the amount of farms subsidized or factories built in certain areas, etc. These processes shape the ways in which all people who inhabit or use a space see or experience themselves within the context of the

²¹ Mollie Lewis Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013): 66.

larger interactions that constitute and define the character of that space.

Essentially, it could be said that “geographical practices are a component to the articulation of [national] identities,”²² and a person’s immediate surroundings can strongly shape the way in which they identify as a citizen within a metropolitan area or state. The types of buildings, office spaces, parks, housing developments, etc., play a role in facilitating the opportunities citizens are presented for active or productive citizenship. The everyday processes necessary to sustain forms of urban life, such as employment, social gatherings, and commerce, are thrown into a constant mnemonic cycle with the physical environment of the city, producing notions of the self within the context of larger social, political, and national processes. “People do not experience [identity] divorced from the spaces in which they live, work, and travel - they are inextricably tied up in the landscape,”²³ and so certain constructions on or adjustments to that landscape can have pronounced effects on the way identity is understood, felt, and experienced. Buildings represent, essentially “the construction of a nationality and the definition of a national cultural identity,”²⁴ both through their outwardly appearances and architectural design and the kinds of interactions and occupations (office space, storefront, bank, factory, warehouse, apartment complex etc.) the building facilitates. Identities, and particularly in the context of the nation state, national identities, are very much intertwined in the physical construction of the area that constitutes the territory of the nation.

²² Dodds, 314.

²³ Nouwen, 65.

²⁴ Alfredo Conti, “Against Cosmopolitanism: Historic Preservation and the Construction of Argentine Identity,” *Future Anterior* 6, no.2 (2009), 12.

A Note on Sources:

The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis requires that I draw from a wide range of literatures to construct a full narrative of the ways in which the contested spatial productions of Buenos Aires led to a shifting Argentine national identity. My theoretical approach utilizes political, social, and geographical theory to form the basis of the argument that space plays a critical role in articulating political demands and giving visibility and power to marginalized groups. Because this thesis is rooted in historical events, I engage with primary sources such as contemporary newspaper accounts from Argentine publications including *La Prensa*, *La Nación*, the socialist publication *La Vanguardia*, and the anarchist daily *La Protesta Humana*, all of which were accessed through Readex's *World Newspaper Archive*. Additionally, I bring in literature and poetry by various Argentine authors, particularly Borges and his flaneuristic descriptions of bourgeois Buenos Aires, to give a taste of the cultural norms that accompanied and were normalized by various spatial productions.

Many of the texts I utilize in this thesis were originally published in Spanish, as well as all of the interviews I conducted. All translations into English are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Chapter Layout:

This thesis will be argued in three chapters, divided chronologically, to pinpoint key events and spatial productions within Buenos Aires that ultimately helped to facilitate the shift to a working class national identity under Perón. Chapter One discusses the rise of the Argentine export economy at the end of the 19th century, which catapulted the country to the status of one

of the world's wealthiest within two decades. The immense prosperity of the economy, which stemmed from international trade, created and fostered an elite bourgeois class that focused on cultivating a national image of middle class cosmopolitanism. I argue that this elite class was able to form and determine the burgeoning country's national identities through their control over the socio-spatial production of the nation's gateway to the world, Buenos Aires.

The second chapter focuses on the working class resistance to these imagined forms of national belonging propagated by the nation's bourgeoisie. Because the elites exerted an oligarchic control over both the Argentine economy and political system, the working class contested their overarching and disproportionate power over the national trajectory through alternative or subaltern productions of space. By articulating their political demands through the use of the cityscape of Buenos Aires, the working class was able to expose weaknesses in Bourgeois national hegemony, and the various conflicts and transitions that characterized this period laid the groundwork for the manifestation of working class national identity under Perón. I particularly engage with the work of Argentine Marxist historian Julio Godio, and his seminal text, *Historia del movimiento obrero Argentina, 1870-2000* in establishing notions of oppositional working class identity and spatial practices.

The third chapter focuses on the Perón era spatial productions of Buenos Aires, and how these helped to reinscribe oppositional spatial practices; however at this point they were officially codified under the state. Resistance tactics were co-opted by the Peronist party as means to reinforce the idea of a "united" working class Argentina. National power was demonstrated through elaborate street productions and symbolic "re-occupations" of public space from the elite bourgeois classes, who under Perón were often deemed "anti-national."

Particularly, I engage with Argentine historian Mariano Ben Plotkin's cultural history of the nation under Perón. Plotkin argues that one of the main tactics the Perón administration utilized was symbolic productions of space in order to cement the working class power of the regime. I engage with this analysis, and also discuss the ways in which working class nationalisms were produced and sustained through more concrete economic and social productions of space. The national government under Perón used state resources to create more working class control over their own lived space, lessening the political and ideological distinctions between Lefebvre's notions of "lived space" and "abstract space."

Finally, I call upon the reader to use this thesis as a starting point to understand how social and political change is articulated through the means of spatial production; on how to exert demands within and outside of the state, and how to measure shifts in common ideas of culture and living. This thesis does not attempt to position Peronism or other forms of state-sanctioned nationalism as the pinnacle of just redistributive policies. The Perón administration has been criticized for its authoritarian and fascistic tendencies: indeed, by 1955 his many enemies had formed a strong enough coalition to (violently) overthrow Perón's national government. However, by recounting the histories of people claiming their "right to the city" through their refusal to accept the state's initial hegemonic ideal of its use, I hope to provide a reference point for organizers and others who seek some sort of social or political change. As Foucault once called upon his reader, "it's up to you, who are directly involved with what goes on in geography, faced with all the conflicts of power which traverse it, to confront them and construct the instruments which will enable you to fight on that terrain."²⁵ Excluded from the political life

²⁵ Foucault, 174.

of the nation for decades, the Argentine working class found other ways to dismantle hegemony - coming at it from the civil society half and utilizing this entrance to exert themselves in political society. It is incredibly empowering to know that one is part of a long history of struggle and that these struggles have brought about real change in the livelihoods of urban inhabitants. The reclaiming of space by groups that are marginalized by the state provides an opportunity to disrupt the hegemonic narrative and perceived “naturalization” of capitalist norms, therefore exposing holes in the system itself and giving social movements the chance to assert their demands. Visions for real social change often begin their articulation through spatial representation and production.



Nighborhood Map of Buenos Aires

Source: Argentina Tango Archives

Chapter 1

“A Vision of the Streets”:

Bourgeois spatial production and national identity in fin-de-siecle Buenos Aires

If all things are devoid of matter
and if this populous Buenos Aires
comparable to an army in complexity
is no more than a dream
arrived at in magic by souls working together,
there's a moment
in which the city's existence is at the brink of danger and disorder
and that is the trembling moment of dawn
when those who are dreaming the world are few and only a handful of night owls
preserve
ashen and sketchy
a vision of the streets
which they will afterward define for others.

-Jorge Luis Borges, *Daybreak*

Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century was undergoing rapid social change and unprecedented economic expansion. While the first half of the nineteenth century had been characterized by various civil wars and factional struggles for power in the wake of independence from Spain, by 1880 Argentina had cemented its territory and stabilized its political system. The 1853 national constitution and the federalization of the city of Buenos Aires in 1880 both solidified the consolidation of a national state under the federalist model. After almost seventy five years of in-fighting, Argentina was able to set its sights on state formation and, especially, towards the international market.

This period was characterized by an economic and cultural boom that thrust Argentina into the spotlight as a major world power. At the center of the nation-building project lay the city of Buenos Aires - the crown jewel of Argentina's prosperity with its huge ports, cultivated cultural elite, and large immigrant population. The emphasis on Buenos Aires in national life was reflected in the economic and cultural prestige awarded to the metropolis, and as the center of the burgeoning nation's economic boom, the particular practices of urban spatial production utilized within the city served to articulate and iterate larger notions of Argentine national identity.

Primarily, the Argentine economy was based around an export model, and as is typical in export-based economies, this led to a Porteño society, and a society in the nation at large, that was highly stratified by class. The elite political and cultural emphasis on cosmopolitanism and the international market led to the proliferation of urban and spatial productions that reflected both the present moment and future national aspirations from the perspective of those who controlled those political and cultural means of production - *"a vision of the streets which they will afterward define for others."*

Large swaths of the city of Buenos Aires, in particular, were not developed with an eye towards the larger working class population - indeed many areas were specifically designed with their exclusion in mind. However, despite the economic, cultural, and physical influence of the elite on conceptions of bourgeois national identity, other lived realities existed within the physical space of the nation, especially in Buenos Aires. The abstract space of the bourgeois political system and economy isolated and distanced itself in its dream world of nouveau riche grandeur from the lived space of the typical Buenos Aires inhabitant. Tensions deriving from this misrepresentation and the often violent suppression by the Bourgeois ruling class against

efforts by the working class to integrate into the abstract space of political society led to a battleground cityscape where various and oftentimes opposing political and economic interests articulated and voiced their frustrations, demands, aspirations, and goals. This contention led to continued refurbishings of national identities through the contested productions and uses of the physical space of Buenos Aires.

The Gilded Age:

Argentine state formation as economic integration into the international market was so pronounced in the early days after the country's unification that by the late nineteenth century it had become "the most dynamic and opulent of the Latin American Republics."²⁶ Argentina had established itself as the main trading partner and largest beneficiary of foreign investment in Latin America from the western European powers, especially Great Britain - in 1890, British investment capital in Argentina was estimated at over 157 million British pounds.²⁷ This inundation of foreign capital was due largely in part to an economic consensus reached by the oligarchical, landowning elite of the new nation in 1880 (aptly referred to as "The Generation of 80) to adhere to a very liberal economic doctrine in which trade tariffs were minimized, international investment was encouraged and promoted, and the free market was viewed as the harbinger of national prosperity. By 1914, Argentina had become one of the top five producers of wheat and frozen beef in the world, due in large part to the fertility of the Pampas region - a flat, expansive plain area surrounding the province of Buenos Aires, comparable in climate and agricultural productivity to the Midwest region of the United States.

²⁶ David Rock, *Argentina: 1516-1987* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987): 119.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

Argentina's national experiment quickly became a triumph of nineteenth century international capitalism, both in its productive capacities and its tendency to "favor the owners of enormous expanses of rural land."²⁸ As is typical in export-based societies, class stratification was pronounced and the vast majority of fertile and farmable land was held by a small, oligarchic elite. "For more than three decades - from the 1880's through the early years of World War I," explains historian James Scobie, "this elite class ruled the rich inheritance of the Pampas as enlightened and progressive trustees. They owned the land and controlled the means of production."²⁹ While Scobie uses the term "means of production" to refer, quite literally, to the ways in which crops were harvested, brought to market, and sold to Great Britain, Germany, and the United States, the same term could be applicable to describe the control these elites exercised over national culture and identity formations during the period. As one contemporary describes, the Generation of '80 "fills the parliament, the press, the bar, the academic chairs: it moves ideas and capital: it is the generation that today acts as its point of greatest power, the head, heart and strength of all Argentines."³⁰ The power structures associated with the export economy led to a national hegemony that emphasized the enlightened elites as the lifeblood for the whole of Argentina. Positing the oligarchy as "the head, heart, and strength of all Argentines" created a sense of communal national identity under the complete dominance of the cosmopolitan elite.

This oligarchy, which comprised of "the landowners, financiers, politicians, and merchants who emerged with the agricultural exploitation of the pampas,"³¹ used the wealth and

²⁸ Conti, 2.

²⁹ James Scobie, *Argentina: A City and a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 178.

³⁰ Argentine poet Paul Groussac quoted in Martin Garcia Merou "Introducción" to Miguel Cane, *Prosa Ligera* (Buenos Aires, 1919): 17.

³¹ Scobie, 172.

power they garnered to exert an almost complete control of national development. These bourgeois aristocrats “brought new blood and a dominant spirit of material progress to the elite class. Many were nouveaux riches, for in a rapidly growing nation wealth did much to compensate for tradition.”³² Argentina, which for most of its previous existence had placed descendents of the original Spanish Colonial rulers at the pinnacle of the social pyramid, veered rapidly in the direction of capitalist modernity as the main signifier of national elitism under the influence of the oligarchic class. Following in the footsteps of the western industrial powers that were implementing and transitioning to bourgeois capitalism, wealth, rather than history and blood, became the main basis for respectability, honor, and prestige.

This push towards modernity, and the emphasis on a free market and trade-oriented economy, led to a blurring of traditional class lines between the elite and middle classes: their economic interests in the early years after national consolidation, with the elites controlling land cultivation and the middle classes working in the bureaucratic aspects of the export economy, were heavily intertwined - so much, in fact, that in his seminal study on the middle class in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century, renowned sociologist Gino Germani considers the oligarchic and middle classes as part of the same demographic group, with the “totality of people corresponding approximately with the ‘social type’ of middle class.”³³ The middle class aspirationally associated itself with the traditional elites, intentionally distinguishing themselves from the laboring classes through their appropriation of elite taste and cultural norms,³⁴ and the “social type” as categorized by Germani implies notions of shared identity between the elite and

³² Scobie, 172.

³³ Gino Germani, “La clase media en la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Estudio Preliminar” (1942) in *La Sociedad en cuestión* (Buenos Aires: Clasco, 2008): 129.

³⁴ Scobie, 175.

middle classes that emphasized cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and free market trade, as well as the cultural and aesthetic values associated with modern nation-building and city-planning. The project of establishing a national identity revolved around these exclusive notions of belonging that were produced and reinscribed through cultural and spatial productions.

Michael Cané, one of the members of the “Generation of 80,” described the oligarchic control over the nation’s development with an anecdote deployed in his eulogy to Carlos Pellegrini, president of Argentina from 1890-92:

When a worker presents himself asking for work, he needs to justify his suitability in the office he intends to execute. It seems to me that if this sort of guarantee is required by the owner or employer of a factory and is indispensable in industrial life, it is even more necessary in national life. The patron in this case is the people, and they are the ones who should display their service sheet to each and every one of the candidates who ask for their votes.³⁵

The exclusive nature of this sort of perception of Argentine national life, in which the common inhabitant is viewed simply as an asset in the larger national project and their worth solely determined by the ability to contribute to the economic and political success of the country’s Bourgeois, was the norm of the era. The needs of the working and popular classes were forgotten in the name of modernity and progress.

Bourgeois Buenos Aires:

While these elites gained their wealth from the fertile pampas region, this wealth was then transmuted, invested, and manifested in the spectacle of Buenos Aires. The Pampas were

³⁵ Miguel Cané, “*La Cultura Argentina: Discursos y Conferencias* (Casa Vacarro: Buenos Aires, 1919): 119.

the elite's bank, and the city their playground. The city specifically became a site of nationalistic pride in the context of an international capitalist market controlled by elite interests. The national opulence and grandeur that characterized the economic boom of the era were practiced tenfold within the capital city, and Argentina's economic success as a country "was overshadowed to an even greater degree by [that of] the city of Buenos Aires." Buenos Aires was Argentina's main port, perfectly positioned for success in the new international markets that relied most heavily on overseas trade. People and money poured into the city in droves, with 1 in 4 citizens of Argentina living within the Buenos Aires metropolitan area,³⁶ and the port's eastern seaboard preeminence was second only to New York. Argentina invested almost everything in its entrance and exit point to the rest of the world to ensure there was no mistaking its new role as a wealthy and developed modern nation-state. And in return, the world viewed Argentina through the kaleidoscope of Buenos Aires.

In the still relatively new nation, national identity and belonging were contested and piecemeal. The rapid economic growth due to international trade and European influence immediately gave the middle and upper classes something to concretely point to as an example of national success, and produced aspirational nationalized imaginaries for the poor and working classes. When one said "Argentine," the most immediate connotation of the era would be that of a porteño tradesman or civic worker with clean shoes and ironed pants, smoking a cigarette from the terrace of his apartment in Barrio Norte, or of his well-dressed daughter, strolling the fashionable shops of Avenida Florida on a Saturday afternoon. Indeed as one European visitor describes after visiting Buenos Aires in the early 1900's:

³⁶ Richard J. Walter, *Politics and Urban Growth in Buenos Aires, 1910-1942* (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 2.

Buenos Aires is something between Paris and New York. It has the business rush and the luxury of the one, the gaiety and pleasure loving aspect of the other. Everybody seems to have money, and to like spending it, and to like letting everybody else know that it is being spent.³⁷

The society of Buenos Aires was based around the consumptive processes that sustained the international capitalism that had made the city so wealthy, and because “the impact of Argentina’s late-nineteenth century expansion principally affected the ports and the city of Buenos Aires,”³⁸ the city itself became the focal point for the development of a national identity that depended upon the economic benefits of international trade; the basis for the prosperity. The Argentine state had only recently been consolidated, and common histories and legacies had yet to be developed. At “this crucial moment in the evolution of the nation, development remained focused on a city rather than on a frontier,”³⁹ which left imprinted conceptions of the nation as one of ports rather than prairies, and “the surging prosperity and activity of the coastal city in the early twentieth century endowed Argentina with the reputation of a middle class society.”⁴⁰ The abstract space of cultural production, state-enforced export capitalism, and government bureaucracy all sought to perpetuate this image of Argentina, often ignoring the realities of lived space and the non-elite sectors of Argentine society.

Argentine National Identity through the Elite Spatial Production of Buenos Aires:

At the turn of the century, it was commonplace for the global bourgeois elite to “use

³⁷ James Bryce, *South America: Observations and Impressions* (London: Macmillan, 1912): 318.

³⁸ Scobie, 160.

³⁹ Ibid..

⁴⁰ Ibid., 175.

their capital cities as statements of their presumption, or pretention, to “modern” status for themselves and for their patrias,”⁴¹ and similar bourgeois urban renewal projects were taking place the world over, from Rio to New York to Paris. National economic success through the global market was embodied by the emerging world capital cities. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, president of Argentina in the late 1870s, called for “a practical and symbolic reconstruction of the porteño milieu that would speak to the nation’s progressive aspirations and the city’s growth... [and] the model for such urban reform must obviously be European.”⁴² The entrance of Argentina onto the world market called for an urban reform that further facilitated and reflected the successes of the nation as measured by European standards and would espouse the aspirational cosmopolitanism of a modern Argentina.

In Buenos Aires, as resources and goods were brought in from around the world, the prosperity garnered by the city was felt and manifested in its physical design, with most of the “architecture and urban design of the period...[involving] French, Italian, British, or German expressive references.”⁴³ Just as Sarmiento and other members of the Generation of ‘80 intended, the success and nature of the oligarchic classes and their cosmopolitan leanings were “made patent in the very shape and texture of Buenos Aires,”⁴⁴ announcing the wealth and modernity of the nation while serving as its bridge between the fertile Pampas and the elite culture and aesthetics of Europe.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Richard Needell, “Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires: Public Space and Public Consciousness in Fin-De-Siecle Latin America,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 3 (1995): 519.

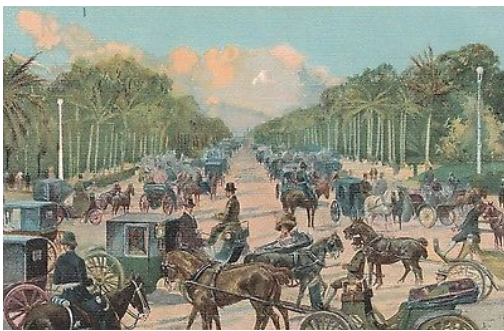
⁴² Quotation from, *El Nacional* during 1870 signed by 'D' and ascribed by Beccar Varela to Sarmiento in Adrian Beccar Varela, *Torcuato de Alvear: Primer intendente municipal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires: Su accion edilicia* (Buenos Aires, 1926): 14-15.

⁴³ Conti, 3.

⁴⁴ Needell, 557.

⁴⁵ Richard Needell, “Optimism and Melancholy: Elite Response to the Fin de siecle Bonaerense,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31, no. 3 (1999): 557.

These urban buildings and projects, then, reiterated and reinscribed the Argentine national project to produce a cosmopolitan citizenry. Following the grandiosity of Second Empire Paris' (in)famous city planner Baron von Hausmann, Buenos Aires expressed its wealth in grand, and often destructive, civic projects that included wide boulevards lined with cafes and shops, government buildings in the French or Italian neoclassical style, and various parks, plazas and gardens that added color to the cityscape. Borges recalls this vision of the city fondly in his work *On Argentina*, noting that "the plazas - noble basins overflowing with coolness, congresses of patrician trees, settings for romantic meetings - are the unique havens where for an instant the streets give up their persistent geometric nature and break ranks."⁴⁶ Borges was well known for



1910 Postcard of Avenida Sarmiento, which runs through the Botanical Gardens and Bosques of Palermo in the northern part of the city
Photo Source: Edición Carmelo Ibarra

his bourgeois tastes and aesthetics, and his urban haunts tended to be in the northern sections of the city, where the parks and plazas he held so dear were concentrated. Borges viewed the construction of barrio life as "the production of social and cultural identity,"⁴⁷ and through his widely read works, he facilitated the production of an exclusionary Argentine national identity by focusing on the middle class oriented, manicured

portions of the city. Referring to the southern sections of the city in his 1923 preface to *Fervor of Buenos Aires*, he even goes as far as to state "on purpose, I have left out [in my poetry] what I feel to be foreign to Buenos Aires: the rush of crowded downtown streets, and the sad and common mobs...my poetry tries to represent present-day Buenos Aires, the amazement and the wonder of the places my long rambles lead me."⁴⁸ Like the oligarchical national government,

⁴⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *On Argentina* (New York: Penguin-RandomHouse, 2010): 35.

⁴⁷ Adrián Gorelik, "El color del barrio", *Variaciones Borges* 8 (1999): 51.

⁴⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires, 1923): 8.

Borges was more concerned with a cityscape and national identity that presented a refined cosmopolitanism, and intentionally excluded the popular classes, “the sad and common mobs,” from the benefits of spatial production and the cultural productions that emulated and supported it. Borges espouses an urban cosmopolitanism in his writings that constitutes an exclusive, Bourgeois ideal of national identity and belonging.

The construction of plazas, parks, and boulevards in the name of urban renewal was part of a concerted effort to remove the aesthetically unpleasant aspects of the central areas of the city and produce a romping ground for the city’s elite, and they “attracted the high society of Buenos Aires for fashionable afternoon drives and also were the location of the aristocracy’s private palaces and gardens.”⁴⁹ The location and designs of the new urban fabric were intentional, determined as part of the larger Argentine national project to become a modern, middle class nation-state, and indeed, “beautification directly accompanied the porteño craze for modernization”⁵⁰ throughout the period. Beauty became emblematic of progress, and a social value in and of itself. Elites fashioned their private homes to become public spectacles nestled off the edge of the grand boulevards, flaunting their wealth and embodying the exalted position they held in Argentine society. One contemporary novelist, Lucio V. Lopez, describes the glamour of an aristocratic mansion off of Av. De La Libertador:

the mansion...clearly revealed that the owner of the home worshiped fanatically the century of the tapestry shop and the bibelotaje...[with] all the anachronisms of modern decoration...Montifiori...in the matter of chic...was the arbiter of the aristocracy bonaerense (of the province of Buenos Aires)”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Scobie, 167.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lucio V. Lopez, *La gran aldea: Costumbres bonaerenses* (Buenos Aires, 1909): 212-13.



*Palacio Leloir, built in 1903 in the French Art Nouveau style.
Photo Source: Public Domain, taken in 1914.*

Lopez's use of "arbiter" describes the way the house conjures notions of success, gentility, and power associated with the country's elite. The private sphere of elite consumption patterns produced an aestheticized image of an elitist collective, and emphasized the vital role urban spatial production played in maintaining a displayed cosmopolitan national identity.

The notion of urban beautification took on a biopolitical role as it became synonymous with "modernization" and "civilization" amongst the elite sectors, and they viewed aesthetic beauty as imperative for the nation to mold its citizenry to a certain standard of global elite consumption practices. The urban reforms taking place in Buenos Aires "had been designed not only to announce but also to help induce Argentina's emergence as a 'civilized' nation by the cultural impact of the reforms on the Argentines themselves."⁵² Amongst those who controlled the spatial production of Buenos Aires, it was widely believed that an appropriate urban environment would serve to rid the city of many of its ills, and facilitate a leap into the community of "civilized" nation-states.

City Building...for Who?:

This urban modernization and the hegemonic national imaginaries it espoused, while positing itself as a collective, national endeavor, was often at odds with the reality of many

⁵² Needell, 527.

inhabitants of Buenos Aires. “The liberal vision of Argentinean modernization required extensive urban renovation,”⁵³ and again, as in Hausmann’s Paris, this urban renovation was designed specifically for a bourgeois middle class citizenry and often came at a cost to the working class members of Argentine society. Contemporary accounts tell of “unprecedented day-and-night wrecking operations that cleared away arcades of tawdry shops...and appropriations were made for broad avenues [which] brought down many old buildings.”⁵⁴ These vast projects, such as the widening of central avenues and the affixation of grand monuments and civic buildings to the already dense urban fabric, did not take into account the livelihoods of the shop owners whose stores were destroyed to clear the streets or the densely populated tenements just to the west of the Plaza de Mayo that were cleared en masse to present a more “modern” urban facade.

In practice, the middle and upper classes “benefitted the most from [the] construction” of these parks and boulevards, which facilitated “the removal of any ‘insuperable objects’ to free transit.” These “insuperable objects” referred to the gridded network of dense side streets that prevented rapid transit through the downtown area, which were mainly inhabited by poor immigrant workers. Towards the end of the 19th century, plans began in the downtown area for a large boulevard, the Avenida de Mayo, to connect the President’s house, the Casa Rosada, with the new Congressional Palace. The initial groundwork construction required the expropriation of a large tract of workers’ housing between Av. Rivadavia and Av. Victoria to facilitate the street’s expansion, and the original inhabitants were compensated poorly, if receiving anything at all.⁵⁵ The grandiosity of the government buildings and the connecting boulevard were prioritized over

⁵³ Conti, 5.

⁵⁴ Scobie, 167.

⁵⁵ “Esa Avenida!” *La Vanguardia*, September 15th, 1894.

workers' homes.



*Contemporary aerial photograph of downtown Buenos Aires, showing how boulevards cut through existing urban fabric
Source: Google Earth*

There was little thought amongst the elite classes to larger issues of responsible social planning, and there are few contemporary accounts that express any sort of preoccupation with the plight of the working classes throughout this process of modern urban renewal. The city's poor were "ignored or... had their rights and interests trampled upon....the problem of housing for the mass of urban dwellers worsened desperately during this era."⁵⁶ Resources were distributed to create the aesthetic of a modern nation state rather than create living environments for the thousands of immigrants pouring into the city every year, indeed "the absence of proposals for working-class neighborhoods and their amenities is noteworthy....the State concentrated its resources on the construction of symbolic buildings - the capitol, the university, etc."⁵⁷ The city government used its political power to ensure the cosmopolitan spatial production of vast areas of the city through a string of regulations and laws, including legislation in 1880 that banned women from washing clothes on the banks of the Rio De la Plata, a tradition amongst the

⁵⁶ Needell, 537.

⁵⁷ Richard Morse, *Rethinking the Latin American City* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993): 35.

porteños for decades, in order to not interfere with port traffic,⁵⁸ and a 1910 ordinance that “sought to control the quality of materials used, the height of the structures in relation to the width of the street upon which they were constructed, and the overall appearance to encourage the development of aesthetically pleasing constructions.”⁵⁹ Official legislation produced and maintained incentives that sought to create a metropolis and a citizenry that was refined, international, and geared toward consumption.

“Así fue Buenos Aires:”

Juan Manuel Pintos, an Argentine author, recounts his time growing up in turn of the century Buenos Aires in his memoir *Así fue Buenos Aires*. The account, written in 1950 at the height of the Peronist working class era, is a practice in national nostalgia - Pintos mourns the days when the cosmopolitan bourgeois represented the true spirit of national belonging. He recalls the feeling of pride, walking down Avenida Florida on a Sunday afternoon, seeing the men “dressed in the English aristocratic style...and ladies and girls in their beautiful spring dresses.”⁶⁰ The main street-car lines and large carriage boulevards, he notes, all ran through the north of the city, through the wealthy and middle-class neighborhoods of Recoleta, Hipodromo, and Belgrano, so that on Sundays there would be a mass exodus of people arriving on Avenida Florida from the horse races at Hipodromo, dressed in their absolute Sunday best.⁶¹ The view of the fashionable people coupled with the rows of high-end shops in the French traditional style gave him a feeling of immense national pride, and his memories of the street “vibrate with

⁵⁸ Scobie, 168.

⁵⁹ MCBA, *Reglamento de construcciones: Noviembre 1910* (Buenos Aires, 1911).

⁶⁰ Juan Manuel Pintos, *Así fue Buenos Aires: tipos y costumbres de una época* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Coni, 1954): 18.

⁶¹ Ibid, 18.

patriotic fervor.”⁶² He romanticizes the image of the Argentine flag “sky blue and white” waving in the window of every store, while men leaning against the windows smoking cigarettes discussed their latest “acts of civism”⁶³ like the gentleman they were intended to be.



*Sketch of two middle class men and one woman
on Avenida Florida, 1909*

Source: University of Buenos Aires archives

To be sure, this is an incredibly exaggerated and idealized memory, a politicized nostalgia that sought to counteract the working class propaganda that was pervasive at the time of the memoir’s publication. However, the descriptions conjure an image of middle class, cosmopolitan nationalism. Pinto associates the international aesthetics of the street, the English dress and the French architecture, with an Argentine identity, manifested in his feeling of patriotism at the moments of visualization. His rhetoric implies a sense of national belonging that was produced by the spaces that represented Argentina’s success within the bourgeois international economy.

This exclusive national imaginary, transcribed into the Avenida Florida of the early 20th century, was a cultivated and carefully maintained image. Pinto notes that there was a “large and very dirty”⁶⁴ conventillo on the street for a number of years, before it was torn down by the city in 1900 to make way for a movie theater, which Pinto seems to recall with glee. Like the businesses and housing that were cleared to make way for the Avenida de Mayo, and the easy access to transportation in wealthy neighborhoods but not in working class barrios, the bourgeois ostentation of Florida came at a cost to those who did not fit the nationalized and aestheticized mold.

⁶² Ibid, 24.

⁶³ Ibid, 24.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 20.

Chapter 2

Spaces of Resistance:

Oppositional Working Class Productions of Space

Workers! Proclaim the right to strike - which is insurrection - the most sacred of all. Realize that only the spirit of solidarity and action can save us. Better for them, the shearers, if we are many the conscious, those who without cowardice raise our banner of combat, for that will be enough to triumph over the clubs and the peaks.

- *Alberto Ghiraldo, "De la Violencia"*

We live in a state in where the few live on the masses, and the masses work desperately for the exclusive benefit of the few. The era of political revolutions has passed, and the century in which we enter.... will be the century of social revolutions, which will symbolize nothing more than a new phase of politics. We have fought centuries for freedom. In order to consolidate our triumph, we will now fight for equality and we will reach fraternity. It will not be done, in short, until we complete the motto that so far has been imperfectly pursued by the Republic.

- *La Protesta Humana: el periódico anarquista, March 22, 1902*

The wealth of Buenos Aires and Argentina was not created by the hands of the elite.

Though their iron-grip control of the means of economic and cultural production meant that they

exerted significant influence in shaping the new country's blossoming national identity and imagination, the lived reality of a city life based in the flow of international capital was much different for the majority of its inhabitants. Scobie explains that "at the base of the city's economic and social pyramid existed the two thirds of porteño inhabitants who labored with their hands...despite increasing employment opportunities, economic benefits were slow in reaching the lower classes."⁶⁵ The grand Avenida de Mayo, the new Palacio del Congreso, and the expanded network of parks and boulevards were all constructed by the working class of Buenos Aires, yet they were least able to experience them, and their grandeur represented a nation whose wealth had yet to trickle down into their pockets. As Argentina became richer, the economic chasm between the elite and the working classes grew larger.

The curious thing about cities, in many ways, is that so many different forms of life exist in one place, constantly toppling over one another as narratives intertwine. Buenos Aires is no exception, and the lives of the poor and the rich, the working class and the elite, all fuse and coincide to create the spectacle of the metropolis. Working class Argentines in the early 20th century saw the manifestations of the wealth their supposed comrades in nationalism were ostentatiously flaunting. The elite influence shaping Buenos Aires and Argentina, failed to integrate the working class in a manner that "matched [the nation's] social and economic change,"⁶⁶ and this resulted in agitation amongst the classes who felt they were not being represented either politically or in the national imaginary of Argentina.

Because formal politics neither reflected nor adequately represented the popular sectors, the struggle for material gain and national recognition played out in the streets rather than in the

⁶⁵ Scobie, 175.

⁶⁶ Rock, 162.

legislative houses. The working class of Buenos Aires exerted their power through impressive and varied spatial strategies such as mass street protests and public gatherings, in addition to the general strikes that were periodically organized by the anarchist and labor groups. These general strikes required highly structured opposition, and by the early 20th century Argentine anarchist groups proved to be among the most influential in the world. By claiming their right to produce urban spaces to fit their needs, in opposition to the bourgeois proscription of these same spaces' usage, the working class exerted and expressed alternative national identities that more closely aligned with their lived experiences. Through the spectacle of the city street, the working class navigated the mimetic relationship between urban spatial productions and state-legitimized national identities, which eventually led to an institutionalized working class political front culminating in the election of Juan Perón in 1946.

A City of Immigrants and Tenements

The Right to the City and Alternative Working Class Nationalisms:

The prosperity of Argentina in the early twentieth century attracted hordes of European immigrants, and by 1895 foreigners constituted nearly half of the population of Buenos Aires.⁶⁷ Many of these immigrants were poor and unskilled, and the majority came from Italy, Spain, and Eastern Europe. These immigrants provided the backbone of Argentina's economic expansion through their labor, particularly in spaces that facilitated the functioning of the export economy such as ports and railroads.⁶⁸ Immigrant barrios, such as the famous La Boca, were usually located proximately to places of work in the southern section of the city, geographically isolated from the wealthier areas to the north. As the population of Buenos Aires exploded and

⁶⁷ Julio Godio, *Historia del Movimiento Obrero Argentino* (Buenos Aires: Grancia Editor, 2002): 71.

⁶⁸ Rock, 175.

immigration increased tenfold during the last decade of the nineteenth century, these areas became increasingly crowded and unsanitary. These tenements “served a burgeoning population without benefiting from a matching growth of additional construction,”⁶⁹ and had the poorest access to city services such as waste disposal, clean water, and public transportation. One French visitor describes the situation of workers’ housing in a rather bleak manner: “Once one sees the conventillos (tenements) of Buenos Aires, he will not be able to soon forget the painful memory. Nothing is more filthy, more repugnant...no air, no light, full of decrepit objects and feces.”⁷⁰ In line with liberal market values, the conventillos were in large part owned by absentee landlords who “ignored hygiene in favor of maximizing profits.”⁷¹ Despite the fact that construction and infrastructural updates were prevalent in certain areas of the city, working class neighborhoods and their inhabitants were positioned as an asset to contribute to the material livelihoods of “real Argentines” rather than as fellow citizens deserving of the benefits of a shared national identity.

Crowded neighborhoods, while lacking in amenities, led to a vibrant street scene in the southern barrios at the turn of the twentieth century. The immigrants created their own communities within the city that reflected their cultural mores and histories, and the diverse background and varieties of life that permeated the cityscape helped to sculpt a distinct, new identity of Argentine working class pride. These identities borrowed from both “class and ‘popular’ identities by rooting [themselves] in local settings and oppositional movements.”⁷² Immigrant communities, excluded from the dominant conceptions of Argentine national identity, used their own spaces to exert their senses of cultural belonging. Workers established local

⁶⁹ Needell, 539.

⁷⁰ Samuel Gache, *Les logements ouvriers a Buenos-Ayres* (Paris, 1899): 55.

⁷¹ Department of Labor, “Coste de la vida,” *Boletin* (Buenos Aires, 1908): 5.

⁷² Maria Laura Moreno Sainz, “Anarchisme argentin, 1890-1930. Contribution à une Mythanalyse,” Doctoral Dissertation, Université de Grenoble II, 2003: 15.

theater companies that performed in the barrios for free, started neighborhood credit cooperatives that gave out small scale loans for housing construction, and organized community meetings in which vecinos could express their concerns and ideas for the future of the barrio.⁷³ It was these streets in “the city’s South End...the riverside warehouses of Barracas to the Central Produce Market, the legendary immigrant tenements of La Boca and immediately south of the Catalinas railway depots....that became the focal point of labor unrest and oppositional politics in the twentieth century,”⁷⁴ and where the agitation and unrest associated with political disenfranchisement and economic inequality began.



Side street in La Boca, ca. 1908
Source: *El Historiador*

Even though the immigrant workers created enclaves of their own within the metropolis, showcasing their ability to create their own spaces imbued with their oppositional ideologies, these productions were not legitimized by the power of the state and so did not manifest in material resources for the people who lived in these neighborhoods. Their power in constituting the spatial productions of their own neighborhoods did not translate into either political representation or economic gain because, as exemplified in Michael Cane’s anecdote in the last chapter, the working class was not viewed as recipients of national prosperity but rather as cogs in a greater project that sought to propel the bourgeois classes into the international sphere.

⁷³ “El Hogar Obrero,” *La Vanguardia*, December 14th, 1907.

⁷⁴ Graciela Silvestri, *La fábrica, el río, la ciudad: La construcción del eje portuario metropolitano en el período 1870-1930* (Buenos Aires: Informe CONICET, 1991): 90.

In order to make their demands known, their grievances would have to extend beyond their own barrios and showcased in the bourgeois spaces of Buenos Aires -“the political centres, the financial and commercial district, the edifices enshrining the fine arts, and the residential preserves of the elite and its foreign cohorts,”⁷⁵ and disrupt the normal functioning of the spatial productions of middle class cosmopolitan nationalism. Workers had begun to realize their own power through the way in which they produced the spatio-cultural dynamics of their own neighborhoods. According to Argentine historian Julio Godio, “the long march towards recognition as a national class began in the barrio, and the general premise of cultural integration is the social struggle,”⁷⁶ and the working class began to see themselves as a united front, able to question the national supremacy of the bourgeois classes. Their calls for economic justice and political representation would come to dominate the experience of Buenos Aires, and lead to massive changes in national power structures and conceptions of Argentine citizenship and identity.

Calls for Change and Urban Unrest:

Embellished government buildings, grand boulevards, and large parks and recreational areas were mostly located in the northern, wealthier sections of the city and initially, the main exposure working class porteños had to these edifices was through their construction. Over 400,000 immigrants⁷⁷ contributed their labor to the construction of public works projects at the turn of the twentieth century, providing the backbone for Buenos Aires’ explosive growth while simultaneously profiting from almost none of it. Immigrants “were integrated into society first

⁷⁵ Lopez, 212-13.

⁷⁶ Godio, 76.

⁷⁷ Rock, 175.

as workers and only much later as citizens,”⁷⁸ and this initial distinction between worker and citizen is important because it showcases the contrast between contributing to the state and being a beneficiary of it. Citizenship in the new Argentine Republic was based around national identities of Bourgeois cosmopolitanism, and the working class immigrant was viewed as a resource to be exploited rather than a constituency to be served or integrated into political society in any meaningful way. Even after the enfranchisement acts of 1912, in which Argentina shifted to a representative democracy “in name,” the laws prevented non-naturalized Argentines from voting. In Buenos Aires, almost 50% of the population at the time of the law’s enactment were first generation immigrants,⁷⁹ barring them from any sort of political representation whatsoever.

Without access to political representation, and in a society that was simultaneously generating massive amount of wealth while paying little attention to the growing economic inequalities between the working and bourgeois classes, material desperation necessitated more direct measures to make working class voices heard. The political perspective of the working class, particularly those who ascribed to anarchist or socialist ideologies, “accorded with the reality of a bourgeois state impervious to workers’ demands, but with the possibility of gaining real victories through ‘direct action.’”⁸⁰ During these formative years of the Argentine Republic, direct action would become the main tactic for the working class to assert itself in opposition to bourgeois political and economic hegemony.

Conceptions of direct action stemmed largely from the political ideologies that the European immigrants brought with them from their home countries. The immigrants brought

⁷⁸ Nouwen, 25.

⁷⁹ Godio, 73.

⁸⁰ Ronaldo Munck, “Cycles of Class Struggle and the Making of the Working Class in Argentina,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 19, no. 1 (May, 1987): 31.

their old-world ideas on state-mass relationships, particularly articulated through the ideologies of anarchism, labor-syndicalism, and socialism, indeed, “labor agitators and anarchists accompanied the rising tide of immigration from Spain and Italy. In socialist groups, street meetings, and cafe discussions the urban worker became aware for the first time of his own identity and the possibility for joint action,”⁸¹ and one worker is quoted in *La Vanguardia*, the Buenos Aires Socialist Party newspaper, as “coming to revolutionary consciousness” through spirited conversations with his neighbors at a local cafe.⁸² The lack of political representation in the formal apparatus of the bourgeois Argentine state beget a spatial strategy - the “street meetings and cafe discussions” not only helped to ferment a structured opposition to bourgeois power but simultaneously exerted a pointedly working class identity through the spatial production of streets and other public spaces as spaces of opposition to bourgeois conceptions of citizenship rather than spaces of capitalist production and showcasing. Ideologies that opposed bourgeois capitalism, such as anarcho-syndicalism and socialism which, as noted, many of the immigrants subscribed to, also advocated for spatial strategies in order to make calls for change.

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The proliferation of inequality, the alternative political ideologies practiced by many immigrants, and the focus on spatially based direct action as a means of opposition led to pronounced working class urban unrest that developed almost simultaneously with Argentina’s capitalist trajectory. Strikes and protests were common place in Buenos Aires as early as the 1870’s, with the first massive, noteworthy strike taking place in 1878 amongst typographers in

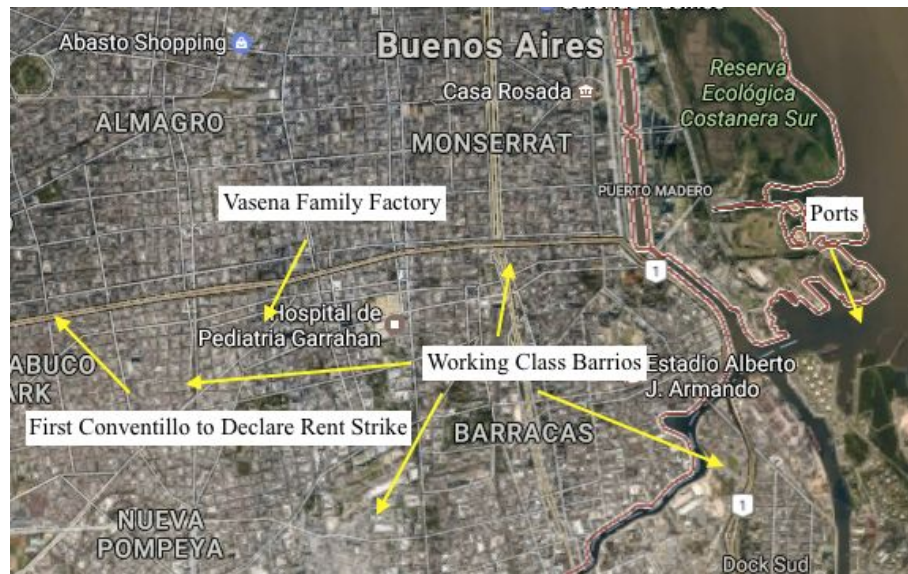
⁸¹ Scobie, 172.

⁸² *La Vanguardia*, October 8th, 1905.

⁸³ Godio, 69.

the city center.⁸⁴ This urban unrest that called for a greater right to the city for workers in Buenos Aires would come to shake the nation's identity to the very core.

The Spectacle: Alternative Working Class Spatial Productions of Buenos Aires:



Satellite image of the southern barrios, exhibiting the locations relevant to the examples used later in this chapter: the ports from where the 1902 General Strike catapulted, the Conventillo from which the 1907 Rent Strike began, and the Vasena Family Factory, where the first violent outbreak of La Semana Trágica took place
Source: Google Maps

As emphasized in the previous chapter and throughout this work, Buenos Aires was very much the epicenter of Argentine life and commerce. The city “was the axis of capitalist modernisation in Argentina,” and thus possessed “the major concentrations of the work-force. It was virtually in that one city that the labour movement of Argentina was born.”⁸⁵ Because of its national importance and the centralization of its capital assets, Buenos Aires became the center of the working class conflict to gain national and political recognition. It is estimated that throughout the 1880's and 1890's, nearly 94% of the nation's strikes took place in Buenos Aires

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ronaldo Munck, *Argentina: From Anarchism to Peronism* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1987): 14.

alone,⁸⁶ and thus the oppositional spatial practices of the city's working class became a vanguard movement for the development of an Argentine working class national identity. The lack of representation in the formal oligarchic political structures of the state led to a form of "mass politics [which] found another expression in large scale demonstrations in the streets of Buenos Aires."⁸⁷ These demonstrations manifested in a variety of forms and tactics, ranging from strikes and mass protests to revolutionary forms of street theater and parody, all of which created and sustained a "euphoric mood of belligerence and opposition"⁸⁸ in the streets of the city.

The demands of the working class were spectacularized through the strategic uses of urban space, calling attention to the inequalities that plagued the country through the agro-export economy model. The spectacle of the street was critical to the formation of a national working class identity, and as one 1917 article from *La Vanguardia* states, the workers "adhered to the movement...through their spirit of solidarity to make their demonstration of collective force, [which] permitted the exteriorization of a link that united the whole working class."⁸⁹ Though their oppositional use and production of urban space and their claims to a "right to the city," the working class was able to articulate alternative nationalisms that challenged the bourgeois hegemony that initially defined popular conceptions of the Republic.

⁸⁶ Godio, 79.

⁸⁷ Rock, 176.

⁸⁸ Geoffrey de Laforcade, "Federative Futures: Waterways, Resistance Societies, and the Subversion of Nationalism in the Early 20th Century Anarchism of the Rio de la Plata Region," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina* 22, no.2 (2011): 76.

⁸⁹ *La Vanguardia*, October 5, 1917.

The General Strike:

One of the main strategies working class porteños utilized was the general strike. The general strike, as opposed to a single-industry strike, implies a level of class consciousness and solidarity rather than an individualized call for increased wages or improved working conditions. The goals of the strike are framed as a class rebellion and advocate a radical restructuring of society in favor of the working class. It is both a mark of solidarity and a demand for recognition, and general strikes have been utilized throughout capitalist modernity to achieve political gains. In Buenos Aires, specifically, “the general strike was given an insurrectional character and was seen as an instrument in the struggle against the state, [as well as] a school for the working class and an instrument of unity.”⁹⁰ The general strike became a way for the working class to express their power and tell the state that they could not simply be viewed as capital to be exploited. Their role in the economic prosperity of Argentina beget social and political representation, and the working class refused to be workers if they could not also be citizens.

The strikes struck Buenos Aires where it hurt the most - the economy. Municipal workers, particularly those who worked in the ports and railroads, understood the integral role they played in the success of the Argentine export economy. Wielding their power, they used their unique position to demand political equality for working class Argentines, and the strikes initially



*Argentine workers on strike, ca. 1912
Source: Libcom*

⁹⁰ Munck, 51.

developed in the strategic centers of Argentine commerce.⁹¹ These demands were negotiated through space; the original transitory function of the ports and railroads, the lifeblood connecting the organs of the nation, was contested by the alternative spatial production of the same space by the working class. This contestation opened up a hole in the rhetorical imaginary of the oligarchic, bourgeois national hegemony. The moment of uncertainty in the absolute power of the state was then used to publicize and expose the injustices perpetrated against workers and give platform to their demands. As one porteño worker describes, controlling the production of economically vital spaces “will make it possible to think of establishing a new regime, a society imagined free, a society in which human individuality is perpetually maintained in its integrity, and voluntary mutual support is the highest and only expression of solidarity among all.”⁹² It was through these exposed contradictions that the working class was able to demand political representation through the working class linkage of economic and spatial power with political action.⁹³

The General Strike of 1902:

By 1902, workers in Buenos Aires had formed highly organized labor groups with strong anarchist affiliations. International solidarity efforts between European and Argentine anarchist groups ensured constant contact and exchange across the Atlantic, and Argentine workers followed the unfolding of the 1902 general strike in Barcelona with earnest. Inspired by “the deep labor agitation that has moved the civilized world and whose example, unprecedented in the secular struggle between capital and labor, has just watered the Earth with the generous blood of

⁹¹ Godio, 79.

⁹² “La Huelga General,” *La Protesta Humana*, April 5 1902.

⁹³ Godio, 145.

the Barcelonian proletariat,”⁹⁴ the workers of Buenos Aires agitated for a similar large-scale struggle against Argentina’s untethered capitalist economy.

An article from *La Protesta Humana* explains to its readers, “we believe in the possibility of immediate economic modification...[a strike] could put into common possession the means of production.”⁹⁵ The official call for a general strike happened on November 22nd, 1902 when La Federación Obrera Argentina, the country’s largest anarcho-syndicalist organization, requested that all their members at the ports and railway hubs go on strike in solidarity with the Carriage-Driver’s union, who had called for an industry strike five days earlier on November 17th. The entire nation was paralyzed, and the export economy brought to almost a complete halt. For the first time in the history of the fledgling republic, “the workers of Argentina led a unified class struggle on a national scale and demonstrated their growing social and political weight in the life of the nation.”⁹⁶ By utilizing the ports of Buenos Aires as a strategic space to make the plight of the working class known and throwing a wrench in the normal hegemonic functioning of the bourgeois export economy, the workers exerted an alternate form of political engagement which thrust them into the spotlight as a national group.

The claims of the working class to both the economic and spatial means of productions were simultaneous through the general strike. The ports, while serving as a capital facilitator also represented the oligarchic grandeur and bourgeois cosmopolitanism with which the city had been built. The working class reclaiming of the port areas represented a pronounced call to the right to the city; a vindication of the washer women who had been banned from the shores in order to facilitate trade and the tenements and small businesses that had been cleared to expand the ports.

⁹⁴ “La Legalidad y la legitimidad,” *La Protesta Humana*, March 15th, 1902.

⁹⁵ “El Anarquismo,” *La Protesta Humana*, April 5th, 1902.

⁹⁶ Munck, 47.

Aside from reclaiming the ports, the workers utilized their absence from work to make themselves known in the streets; marching, burning cars, blocking traffic, and creating a general air of chaos.⁹⁷ The manicured boulevards and green parks of the city center became spaces of conflict and opposition. The reclaiming of space was integral to the visibility of the working class and their calls for social change and political representation. Through a specifically spatial strategy that subverted the intended use of export economy transitory spaces, the working class protested the notion of the Argentine national identity as bourgeois and middle class: a conception that had led to their material and cultural exclusion from the prosperity of the nation. Rhetorically, the strike conveyed the message - “we are Argentines too. This nation would not be what it is if not for us.” The strike thrust an alternative identity onto the national stage: that of the immigrant worker, integral to the life-blood of the nation’s economy and cultural life.

The strike was incredibly successful, both in the gains it achieved for its participants and the attention it brought to their cause. Julio Roca, president of Argentina during the strike, expressed his exasperation at the success of the strike in a speech to the Argentine Congress in early 1903: “During the last few months of our sessions, many strikes have happened in the capital that...have come at great risk to the public and the strength of our national prosperity in this moment of its most crucial development...it has taken place in the principal ports where our products are shipped out, the strike obstructs them and impedes them.”⁹⁸ The strike produced a crisis for the oligarchic and middle classes of the nation, who were forced to reckon with the discrepancies between their economic success and the living standards of the working class, whose work they depended on for their own profit. In order to continue the rate of output and

⁹⁷ “La Huelga General,” *La Protesta Humana* April 5th 1902.

⁹⁸ Quote attributed to Julio Roca in Hiram Mabragaña, *Los Mensajes* (Buenos Aires, 1948).

sustain the country's economic expansion, the propertied sectors of society would have to negotiate with workers. Workers, in turn, began to see themselves

The General Strike of 1919/La Semana Tragica:

A poignant example of the ways in which working class Argentines exerted alternate national identities through oppositional productions of space is what is colloquially known as *La Semana Tragica*. The events of this “week” brought to a violent head the conflicts between the shifting, but still essentially bourgeois, state and disenfranchised members of the working class. In 1916, a pro-middle class political party, the Radicals, won the presidential election. The victory was supposed to be a victory for democracy in Argentina, a blow to the oligarchic hold on the nation's political system and economy. However, “despite the diminution of their political status, the [oligarchic tradition] still enjoyed economic and social predominance in Buenos Aires,”⁹⁹ and the years following the Radical victory soon proved to be a disappointment for working class Argentines and a continuation of bourgeois hegemony. The administration enfranchised the middle classes through the Saez-Peña Law of 1912, which called for universal male suffrage on a secret ballot. However, due to a clause that forbade those not born in Argentina from voting, the largely immigrant working class continued to be relegated to the role of economic or capital asset and denied the basic rights of national citizenship.¹⁰⁰ The frustrations with the Radical government manifested in the action of the working class general strike. However, with the Radical government under increasing pressure from an oligarchy seeking to reclaim its political relevance and the new squadron of anti-communist vigilante groups that had

⁹⁹ Walter, 16.

¹⁰⁰Mark Orton, “100 Years of Saez Peña Law,” *The Argentina Independent*, February 10th, 2012.

sprung up after fears of Soviet subversion following the 1917 revolution, the state responded in a much more violent way than in the past. As Argentine historian Maria Cecilia Di Mario explains, “anticipating Foucault, the illustrious bourgeois of the age knew that the power of discourse signifies a virtual conversion into a discourse of power,”¹⁰¹ and the increased violence during this week in early 1919 represented a concentrated effort by the state to repress the discourse produced by working class occupations and productions of city spaces. The week, then, quickly turned bloody, and the bloodshed represented the growing threat that working class nationalisms posed to the functioning of the Argentine state.

The long term outcomes of the strike were rhetorically beneficial for the idea of Argentine identity as “working class,” and history would come to sympathize with those who had received the brunt end of state and right-wing vigilante violence. Munck states that “the events of 1919 represented the eruption of a deep social crisis, the failure to integrate the immigrant and the continued political marginality of the working class...[however] one effect of 1919 was to draw into the trade union movement wide layers of hitherto unorganized workers.”

¹⁰² Workers showed that through organization they could expose the weak points in bourgeois economic hegemony and exert claims to a more inclusive city space and a hand in the production of national identities. Protestors during the events of the week exerted their right to the city by altering the spaces of Buenos Aires into spaces of conflict to exert their political demands.

The strike began on January 7 1919 when police launched a violent attack on the Vasena metallurgical plant workers, a family business located in the southern barrios, who had been

¹⁰¹ María Cecillía Di Mario, “De crónicas y escrituras en la Semana Trágica,” *Cuaderno de Trabajo*, no. 83 (2008): 10.

¹⁰² Munck, 36.

striking for several days for increased wages. Four workers were killed and thirty injured¹⁰³ in the ensuing struggle, and the following day massive peaceful processions “followed the cortége of one of the workers who had been killed.”¹⁰⁴ This reactionary reclaiming of space by the working class would characterize the conflicts of the week - by following the funeral procession of one of the massacred workers, working class Argentines utilized the space of the bourgeois state to mourn one of their own.

The other Buenos Aires industries and unions soon called a general sympathy strike, turning the initial movement mourning the first lives lost into a broader oppositional coalition that sought to address more fundamental frustrations with the Radical government as a whole. Movement leaders articulated their issues in the pages of all the major city newspapers, claiming that the Radical government promised an “incorporation [into the political system] that never came, rather...like the governments of the purest oligarchical tradition before them, the so called “radicalism” does not scorn the use of bloody repression against the labor movement.”¹⁰⁵ Within two days the entire city virtually ceased to function, and one reporter wrote in *La Vanguardia* on January 11th that “neither carriages, automobiles, nor trams circulated yesterday in our capital, taking away the main characteristic that gives us the enormous traffic in our streets. The lack of street cars gives Buenos Aires the aspect of a dead city.”¹⁰⁶ As in the preceding general strikes, the working class once again exerted their economic power and showcased their critical role in the functioning of the city’s daily life, and leveraged these roles in order to make demands on or protest against the state.

¹⁰³ Di Mario, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Munck, 85.

¹⁰⁵ “El Gobierno y El Movimiento Obrero: Paginas de Sangre,” *La Vanguardia*, January 9th, 1919.

¹⁰⁶ “La Gran Huelga de Solidaridad,” *La Vanguardia*, January 11th, 1919.

La Semana Tragica differed, however, because the violence initially perpetrated by the state was met with more pronounced and, eventually, desperate rebuttals from the working class than was usual. Again, these conflicts manifested through space - the medium which was most available to working class Argentines. Striking porteños utilized their time off from work to demonstrate in the streets, incite riots and other forms of chaos, and create a spectacle in opposition to the violent oppression exerted by state and “anti-communist” vigilante forces. These spatial dynamics were intentional and strategic, and “the streets and avenues in the center of the city were incredibly animated. A great quantity of employees and workers on strike...took the streets and avenues, marching mostly on the places where there had been bloodshed.”¹⁰⁷ The working class shut down the bourgeois economy, and then reoccupied those spaces - streets, plazas, parks - in order to exert a working class national identity in opposition to the bourgeois state which had killed so many of their own.

One of the worst clashes between protesters and police happened on January 11th, 1919. The day before, on January 10th, the city government of Buenos Aires had requested the aid of the military to keep the peace. The national government ordered 1,000 troops to be sent to aid the local police force, and the following day, protesters and police violently clashed at the city’s political and commercial hub: la Plaza del Congreso and the surrounding Avenida de Mayo. According to one worker interviewed in *La Vanguardia*, “From 10 until 11 the rampage of rifles and machine gun discharges was in continuous alarm in the center of the city. The fire was so nourished, it gave the impression of a battlefield.”¹⁰⁸ By noon, 17 striking workers had been killed by the police.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “Continuó ayer la paralización completa,” *La Vanguardia*, January 12th, 1919.

¹⁰⁸ “Continúa la represión excesiva y sangrienta,” *La Vanguardia*, January 11th, 1919.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

After martial law was declared on January 12th, the violence subsided - although there were residual attacks on workers by right-wing vigilante squads for several months following.¹¹⁰ *La Vanguardia* estimated the death toll at over 700 workers,¹¹¹ and the conflict received international attention: *The Duluth News Tribune* wrote on February 22nd, 1919 that they were “unsettled” by the events in Buenos Aires and that grain shipments from Argentina were now “construed as bearish (a stock market term indicating a decrease in value) by traders.”¹¹² The imaginary of Buenos Aires as a hub of urbane cosmopolitanism was shattered, and was replaced by the image of conflict and instability: “the battlefield.”

The Rent Strike of 1907:

Working class Porteños, aside from attempting to subvert bourgeois spatial productions in the export economy, also worked to exert the right to the city in their own neighborhoods. This is perhaps best exemplified in the 1907 rent strike, in which nearly 120,000 inquilinos¹¹³ refused to accept a proposed hike in rents. The conditions in the conventillos, or old houses converted to serve as apartments, were akin to tenement housing, and workers were often isolated in dense and crowded conditions, an average of “5 to 8 people in a room.”¹¹⁴ After



Courtyard/common area of a conventillo ca. 1906
Source: University of Buenos Aires Archive

¹¹⁰ Godio, 140.

¹¹¹ *La Vanguardia*, January 13th, 1919.

¹¹² “Rye Makes Net Price Gain of 3C; Flaxseed Dull,” *The Duluth News Tribune*, February 22nd, 1919.

¹¹³ James Baer, “Tenant Mobilization and the 1907 Rent Strike,” *The Americas* 49, no. 3 (Jan. 1993): 356.

¹¹⁴ Godio, 71.

a 47% rent hike in late September of 1907, tenants in the conventillos in the San Telmo area began to organize meetings and neighborhood rallies to prepare for counter-action.¹¹⁵ Drawing from the success of general strikes in the industrial sectors, the inquilinos decided that a rent strike would be the most effective measure to oppose the unjust living conditions coupled with the exorbitant rise in rents.

Within a week, the strike had spread to adjacent barrios and by October 1st, “more than 750 buildings were on strike....a figure [which] represents nearly one-tenth of the population of the entire city of Buenos Aires”¹¹⁶ at the time. Tenants were highly organized, with several neighborhood and conventillos committees responsible for a wide range of logistical issues pertaining to the strike, including publicity, anti-eviction mobilization, and translations for tenants who did not speak Spanish.¹¹⁷ This community organization represented the ability to control and influence the tenant’s own spaces, and “was evidenced as they organized to operate the building and held nightly meetings on the patio, where they divided the upkeep chores among themselves.”¹¹⁸ Additionally, the striking conventillos tended to be more crowded than their non-striking counterparts,¹¹⁹ which shows that the issue had expanded beyond the simple economics of a rent increase to one that was heavily influenced by living conditions and the workers’ assertions that they were entitled to higher standards of living in their own neighborhoods.

The rent strike differed from the industry strike or the general strike in that its message and purpose were more holistic, covering the more intimate aspects of worker’s lives. Rather

¹¹⁵ *La Protesta*, September 25th 1907.

¹¹⁶ Baer, 356.

¹¹⁷ *La Protesta*, October 6th, 1907.

¹¹⁸ Baer, 355.

¹¹⁹ *La Prensa*, September 17th, 1907.

than simply asserting their right to the bourgeois spaces in the city center like the ports or boulevards, the rent strike signalled a desire to control their own spaces of inhabitation. Women and children became involved in organizing to a greater degree than in the labor movement, and *La Protesta* notes that many of the speakers at tenant rallies during the strike were women, and women were among those arrested following a violent demonstration in late October.¹²⁰ The conditions of the conventillos affected women most directly - for many, it was both their living quarters and their place of employment, as many working class women did paid handy work, such as tailoring and sewing, from their homes. As Juana Buena, a member of the Centro Feminista Anarquista and one of the principal organizers behind the strike emphasized at a rally, “we will not continue to [be relegated] to victimhood. We will fight for our homes, our wages, and our families.”¹²¹ The women involved in the tenant strike were protecting their homes and communities, as well as their livelihoods. They sought to exercise power in the face of bourgeois absentee landlords, and claim their right of inhabitation as a right to the city, a right to control and produce their own spaces. By refusing to pay rent and creating alternate structures outside of and in opposition to the bourgeois state, working class Argentines exerted their right to create their own inhabited spaces and produce their own conceptions of use.

¹²⁰ *La Protesta*, October 23, 1907.

¹²¹ *La Protesta*, October 28, 1907.

Chapter 3

“One Single Class of Men”

Perón and the nationalization of working class identity

The truth? I didn't invent Perón or Evita, the miraculous one. They were born as a reaction to your bad governments. I didn't invent Perón, or Evita, or their doctrines. They were summoned as defence by a people who you and yours submerged in a long path of misery. They were born of you, by you, and for you.

- Enrique Santos Discépolo, Tango Musician

In Argentina there should not be more than one single class of men: men who work together for the welfare of the nation, without any discrimination whatsoever. They are good Argentines, no matter what their origin, their race or their religion may be, if they work every day for the greatness of the Nation, and they are bad Argentines, no matter what they say or how much they shout, if they are not laying a new stone every day towards the construction of the building of the happiness and grandeur of our Nation.

-Juan Domingo Perón

Chapter One began with a poem by Borges, describing the fanciful venture of walking down a Buenos Aires street. Symbolic of the era, the poems of Borges are often read as an ode to

the middle class cosmopolitanism espoused by early-twentieth century porteños. It is significant then, that this chapter begins with a quote by Perón, often deemed the Argentine anti-Borges, for the two men represent the opposite ends of twentieth century Argentine national identities: Borges with his flaneur-esque meanderings through pristine city streets, and Perón with his fierce and anti-intellectual working class nationalism. Indeed, cultural historian Brian Bockleman explains that:

Perón and Borges came to represent very different visions of Argentine culture: Perón the self-styled man of the people, macho, witty, garrulous, but anti-intellectual; Borges the cultivated man of letters, detached, cosmopolitan, encyclopedic. The conflict between them...has long appeared symptomatic of the polarized political and cultural views that have gripped Argentina in the twentieth century.¹²²

The distinction between Borges and Perón signifies the larger transition in conceptions of national identity in Argentina during the first half of the twentieth century. Initially articulated by the spatial practices of oppositional groups during the era of the export-agro economic model, the promotion of an Argentine identity more in line with the popular sectors reached a dramatic head with the election of Juan Perón in 1946. The Borgeses of the country, it appeared, no longer defined the nation's being.

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Argentina changed dramatically after the 1930 military coup which overthrew the “democratically elected” Radical government. 1930-1943 is referred to colloquially as “the

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<sup>122</sup> Brian Bockleman, “Between the Gaucho and the Tango: Popular Songs and the Shifting Landscape of Modern Argentine Identity, 1895-1915,” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 577.

infamous decade,” due to the political instability that characterized the era. The liberal bourgeois hegemony was beginning to break as Argentina reeled from the effects of the Great Depression, and by the time Perón was elected in 1946, “economic liberalism had lost its dominant status in Argentina and had become exclusively associated with opposition to popular democracy.”<sup>123</sup> After another military coup in 1943, in which Juan Perón served as Secretary of Labor, Argentina was put on a fast route to state-sponsored industrial economic development.

After Perón’s election as president in 1946, the emphasis on self-sufficient economic production continued, but this time alongside a pronounced effort by the Peronist state to integrate workers into the Argentine state as full citizens and to redefine national identity as oriented towards the working class. With his populist rhetoric and impassioned calls to “el pueblo” and “los trabajadores,” Perón placed the collective of working Argentine to the forefront of national consciousness.

The initial claims to the means of spatial production that were set in motion by the anarchists, socialists, and labor organizers in the early twentieth century continued to play a role in the politics of the Perón era, despite the fact that the working class was now rapidly being integrated into Argentine political life. Space was often used by the regime to further cement ideas of Argentine nationalism through the production of public works projects that benefitted the most marginalized. Infrastructure projects provided jobs for hundreds of thousands of Argentine workers, and the number of people with access to running water and sewage systems grew from “6.5 million and 4 million (respectively) in 1943 to 10 million and 5.5 million in

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<sup>123</sup> Jorge Nállim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism in Argentina, 1930-1955* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012): 2.

1955.”<sup>124</sup>The power of the Peronist state and its insistence on producing and sustaining a working class citizenry was articulated through spatial productions, a concept long held to be true by oppositional working class activists - the difference now was simply that these productions were state sanctioned and integrated into political society.

### **The Infamous Decade and Increasing Working Class Nationalisms:**

The onset of the Great Depression precipitated the downfall of the liberal consensus in Argentina. The upward trend of the Argentine export economy model, which had lasted almost 50 years, came crashing down as the international markets that the country depended on collapsed. “The Argentine experience” of unbridled economic success was suddenly turned on its head, and the hegemony of a national identity based around the international markets and the cosmopolitan elite that advocated for them shattered.<sup>125</sup>

The turbulent politics of the era reflected this breakdown of economic confidence. The Infamous Decade officially began with what would become Argentina’s first in a long line of military coups, overthrowing the democratically elected President Hipolito Yrigoyen. Initially, the coup attempted to restore power to the traditional landed oligarchy that had exerted control over the country’s trajectory since the 1880’s, but the retrenchment was messy at best and malevolent at worst. Corruption and an air of “social degeneration”<sup>126</sup> plagued the elite classes, who were increasingly susceptible to political scandals as the economy continued to decline,<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Juan Carlos Torre and Eliza Pastoriza, “La Democracia del bienestar,” in Torre (ed.), *Nueva Historia de Argentina: los años peronistas: 1943-1955* (Buenos Aires, 2002): 292.

<sup>125</sup> Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Peron’s Argentina* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003): 18.

<sup>126</sup> Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class 1946-1976* (Cambridge University Press, 1993): 15.

<sup>127</sup> Felix Luna, *Alvear* (Buenos Aires: Penguin-Random House, 2011): 196.



and the popular sectors grew increasingly agitated at the state's inability to assuage the effects of world depression. Even after a so-called "return to democracy" in 1932, "democratic institutions and procedures formed a mere 'facade' in the 1930-1943 period."<sup>128</sup>

The fracturing of liberal hegemony was, increasingly, opening up space for alternate visions of what exactly constituted the Argentine national identity. New working class nationalisms began to exert real power and feature prominently in national discourse, as many of them had evolved as a reaction to the breakdown and corruption of the elite classes as the decade progressed.<sup>129</sup> The traditional ruling sectors were facing threats both internationally and within Argentina, especially as "the expansion and increased visibility of an organized working class, whose demands were sometimes violently expressed,"<sup>130</sup> as detailed in the descriptions of strikes by the Anarchist and Socialist groups, caused the fracturing of elite controlled political society as civil society organizing threatened to pose a threat to entrenched hegemonic power structures. This expansion of the working class, and the increased visibility due to their spatial occupations, displayed the potential power to disrupt the imaginaries of bourgeois Argentina. The state was increasingly viewed as a potential mediator in these class conflicts, especially by workers, and this shift from liberal economic hegemony to calls for a more active state began to pave the way for the rise of Perón.

In Buenos Aires, several other factors contributed to increased working class nationalisms during the period. With the onset of the Depression in 1929, international immigration to the city came to a virtual halt. However, internal migration from the country's

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<sup>128</sup> Peter H. Smith, "Social Mobilization, Political Participation, and the Rise of Juan Perón," *Political Science Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (March 1969): 36.

<sup>129</sup> Luna, 211.

<sup>130</sup> Plotkin, 4.

rural sectors, which had been decimated and impoverished with the collapse of the agro-export economy, more than compensated for the loss. The population of Buenos Aires continued to soar throughout the era, from 1,990,000 inhabitants at the onset of World War I to over 4,000,000 by 1943,<sup>131</sup> and most of the internal migrants were native to Argentina and had no international ties. In addition, many urban workers were now “second-generation Argentines, sons of immigrants who regarded their fathers’ allegiance to alien doctrines such as anarchism, socialism and syndicalism as signs of foreignness.”<sup>132</sup> This did not mean, however, that the tendencies and strategies of these ideologies faded away - quite the opposite. The oppositional tendencies of the working class were stronger than ever; however, they were now articulated as a new form of working class Argentine nationalism that sought the disempowerment of the elite classes and their own political integration.

As the 30’s dragged on and the crisis of free-market capitalism was growing more severe, these working class nationalisms laid stress on “the need to collaborate with the state,”<sup>133</sup> in order to develop some sort of alternative and stimulate the economy. Certain provinces, most notably the province of Buenos Aires under Manuel Fresco, implemented state-mandated industrial development and traces of socialist welfare legislation on a local level.<sup>134</sup> However, these small steps proved incapable of salvaging the larger state of the nation, and in 1943, another military coup overthrew the corrupt government of Ramón Castillo. Over the course of the Infamous Decade, the Argentine military had become a hotbed for a middle ideology between the emerging working class nationalisms and the entrenched elite classes. They supported a new

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<sup>131</sup>Germani, 74-5.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Munck, 110.

<sup>134</sup> Juan Carlos Torre, “La Ciudad y Los Obreros” in *Buenos Aires: Historia de Cuatro Siglos* (Buenos Aires:1983): 275.

kind of nationalism that was anti-foreign capital and anti-corruption, but also held a pronounced view on the need to stem the tide of rage coming from the masses below.<sup>135</sup> However, it is important to note the significance of the military coup regarding “the masses” with the potential to pose a threat to the regime, which shows that those in power started to realize the fundamental role working class Argentines could potentially play in shaping the country. This new emphasis on the working class as a potential political constituent would come to characterize Perón’s approach to refining the national imaginary.

### **The Rise of Perón:**

Perón was initially ushered into power as a part of the 1943 military coup, which implemented a pro-nationalist government that began the processes of state-sponsored industrialization and economic self sufficiency. As *La Prensa* documented on June 5th, 1943, “military authorities [have] stressed the importance of industrial development as a prerequisite for attaining economic independence,”<sup>136</sup> and the junta took a proactive role in labor negotiations and the implementation of social welfare for workers. Perón served as the both the Minister of Labor and Vice President at various points of the regime. As Minister of Labor, he quickly positioned himself as a tactical ally to the working class and labor groups, “passing 29 new labor laws and taking part in 311 labor disputes and 174 settlements, thereby making his name a household word to 2,852,000 Argentine workers,” which gave “labor a definite stake in the perpetuation of Perón’s influence.”<sup>137</sup> Perón emphasized the necessity of state involvement in

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<sup>135</sup> Marvin Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, and Nationalism in Argentina, 1930-1966* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972): 34.

<sup>136</sup> *La Prensa*, June 5th 1943.

<sup>137</sup> Germán Arciniegas, *The State of Latin America*, trans. Harriet de Onis (Buenos Aires: Knopf, 1952): 57.

order to secure just worker's compensation in the economy and perpetuate a national identity that glorified the worker as ideal citizen.

Perón's rising popularity with the working class threatened to destabilize the power structures of the junta, and on October 9th, 1945 he was arrested. Mass demonstrations upon his imprisonment led to Perón's release on October 17th. In 1946, he was elected president by a wide margin of the vote, largely because of a coalition formed between the urban and rural working classes. In his first two years as president, Perón nationalized the railroads and central banks, paid off an over 1 billion dollar debt to Great Britain, and established a system of national health care.<sup>138</sup> All of these reforms materially benefitted the working class, and prioritized them in the political and economic life of the nation.

### **Perón and the Worker as Citizen:**

Perón's appeal lay in his ability to elevate workers to the roles of citizens, a position they had been denied in Argentina since their incorporation into the bourgeois economy. With a focus on internal, state-sponsored production to stimulate the national economy, the emphasis of Argentine identity was placed with workers in factories rather than merchants, international businessmen, or bankers. Perón and his supporters had articulated an oppositional nationalism that was now expressed through the state apparatus of the Perón national government. Political elites were forced to reckon with this power exposed through the contestation of space, and eventually these oppositional nationalisms were able to gain political recognition. Working class nationalisms, which had established themselves in opposition to the bourgeois state, had now

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<sup>138</sup> Godio, 196.

become the dominant, reinforced identity of the state.

This was a pronounced shift in Argentine national identity. For over half a century, the bourgeois cosmopolitan classes had held control of the means of political power and economic production. Their ability to define the national imaginary of the country was contested, initially, by anarchist and socialist groups who questioned the legitimacy and strength of bourgeois hegemony through their contestation of the means of spatial production. Perón's promise to integrate the lived space of the popular sector with the abstract space of state politics resonated with large swaths of the Argentine population. Historian Daniel James states that:

Peronism's fundamental political appeal lay in its ability to redefine the notion of citizenship within a broader, ultimately social, context. The issue of citizenship per se, and the question of access to full political rights, was a potent part of Peronist discourse, forming part of a language of protest at political exclusion that had great popular resonance.<sup>139</sup>

By legitimizing the working class struggle as the struggle of the state, Perón extended political rights to those who had been seeking it for a generation. He created a national imaginary that projected the worker as vanguard nationalist, and "expanded the horizons of the socially possible for countless Argentines - challenging established hierarchies, affirming claims to social citizenship, and emphasising their membership in a more inclusive national community."<sup>140</sup> The working class, finally recognized through legitimate political representation, reaped the benefits of their placement at the forefront of the national project.

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<sup>139</sup> James, 14.

<sup>140</sup> Eduardo Elena, "What the People Want: Political Participation in Peronist Argentina, 1946-1955," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 1 (Feb. 2005): 87-88.

## October 17th, 1945, May Day, and the Use of Symbolic Space:

October 17th, 1945 would go down in Argentine history as the day thousands of workers marched into Buenos Aires and demanded the release of the man they viewed as their national savior. After his arrest by the military junta, Perón's supporters immediately mobilized in large numbers to demand his release, and this was largely possible because of the labor reforms Perón



*The Plaza de Mayo on October 17th, 1945  
Source: University of Buenos Aires Archives*

had implemented as Minister of Labor that facilitated the growth and network capabilities of the country's labor unions. As the working class poured into the Plaza de Mayo, the political and social center of the city and its most culturally sacred space, they created a spectacle of power.

The date would be utilized by the Perón

administration in the subsequent years as a holiday to remember and recreate the occupation of the plaza, spatially reproducing the spectacle that thrust the workers to the forefront of national consciousness. "[There was] a highly symbolic content of these demonstrations in which the workers literally 'took over' the public urban space," with dancing, drinking, and shouting that lasted until the 18th.<sup>141</sup> Hordes of workers - one contemporary account estimates almost half a million<sup>142</sup> - occupied the central city streets that were traditionally associated with the country's bourgeois, and "the events of October 17 and 18 implied a temporary subversion of the existing social order."<sup>143</sup> The spectacle of power truly shook the military government to its core, and it caved to the thunderous outpouring of working class oppositional spatial production. The junta

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<sup>141</sup> Plotkin, 55.

<sup>142</sup> *El Pueblo*, October 18th, 1945.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

complied with the demands for Perón's "freedom and presence" and "the demonstration achieved Perón's triumphant return to the government."<sup>144</sup> The workers made their presence felt in the way that was available to them - mass, spontaneous mobilization, and used it to achieve real material results.

Once Perón was elected president in 1946, October 17th was made a national holiday to celebrate the triumph of Argentine workers over the bourgeois economy and the old oligarchic state. This was articulated in symbolic "re occupations" of the Plaza de Mayo, claiming the nation's most symbolic public space and the location of its central political power as their own. This occupation was in turn codified and legitimized by the Peronist state through its sanctioning of the events as official political holiday, and it was declared that every year there would be marches, parades of civic and industrial workers, and celebrations in the Plaza itself.<sup>145</sup> The images and spectacles performed a working class nationalism that had its roots in oppositional re claiming of space, indeed, "the image of the workers dancing in the traditionally upper-class streets served as a symbolic recreation of the 'takeover' of the city and its symbols of the power that the descamisados ["the shirtless"] possessed."<sup>146</sup> The oppositional, working class use of the Plaza de Mayo was codified through the Perón government. These holidays in the subsequent years of the regime, particularly in the celebrations of 1946 and 1947, were marked by working class spatial expansion from the Plaza de Mayo into other parts of the city. Workers, sometimes violently, crowded into the downtown streets, making a spectacle and harassing those they deemed subversive to the new national-project. Newspapers that were deemed bourgeois, such as *La Prensa* and *La Nación*, were especially targeted: both offices were vandalized and the

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<sup>144</sup> Nallim, 127.

<sup>145</sup> *La Nación*, October 18th, 1946.

<sup>146</sup> Plotkin, 64.

Argentine national flag was hung from the doors and windows.<sup>147</sup> The raising of the flag marked a pronounced shift in conceptions of national identity - bourgeois newspapers were now deemed “anti-national,” deserving of the flag’s imposition onto their spaces.

This symbolic takeover of the plaza and the surrounding streets represented a fundamental transference of power to the working class. In the context of the Perón era, the people who gathered in the Plaza de Mayo for the October 17th celebrations were “presented as the embodiment of national identity.”<sup>148</sup> The spatial tactics used by oppositional groups throughout Argentina’s history were now appropriated by the Perón administration in order to reinscribe the power of the regime. By transforming the original occupation of space into a symbolic spectacle, the Peronist government was able to harness the oppositional power of the working class into a legitimate political agenda.<sup>149</sup> It was through these moments of spatial production, codified by the state, that the working class transitioned from their historic place in the spectrum of civil society to political society. In turn, they received the benefits of national political exposure, from increased wages and material benefits<sup>150</sup> to a more exalted space in conceptions of state hierarchies.

Similar to October 17th, the Peronist regime also worked to reconfigure May Day, the traditional anarchist and socialist celebration of labor activism, to meet the needs of the new national project. May Day served as the rhetorical bridge between the anarchist spatial practices that had fomented oppositional working class nationalisms and the Perón administration. In

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<sup>147</sup> *La Prensa*, October 18th, 1946.

<sup>148</sup> Plotkin, 72.

<sup>149</sup> Here I am utilizing Plotkin’s theories on the transitions between “rituals of inversion” (initial working class oppositional spatial tactics) and “Rituals of reinforcement” (the Perón administrations codification and spectacularization of these events), 56.

<sup>150</sup> James, 132.



conversations with labor leaders, and especially at the beginning of his career when he was actively trying to win over the working class vote, Perón often referred to himself as the next generation in the long lineage of anarchist struggle in the country. An article in *El Líder* from May Day 1948 states that in celebrations commemorating “La Semana Trágica,” Perón addressed the history of the Argentine “working-class struggle, [and] he opted for claiming the Anarchist heritage as his own.”<sup>151</sup> While the truth behind his historic support for Anarchism in Argentina are unclear at best (he was a member of the police forces that oppressed and massacred workers during “La Semana Trágica”), his insistence on claiming this heritage demonstrates the power the occupations were able to exert on the Argentine political system.

### **Peronist Productions of Space:**

The Perón administration utilized spatial production to foment a working class national identity in more concrete, structural ways as well: the 1949 revisions to the Argentine Constitution go as far as to re-define notions of property to create a more “social function of ownership,” and eliminate the individual “involuable right” to inheritance,<sup>152</sup> which created a legal base for the government’s massive expropriation of private land for state projects during the period. National endeavors like massive infrastructural projects, industrial economic expansion, and comprehensive worker’s housing were not deemed as niceties that stemmed from economic success; rather they were viewed as fundamental in the country’s national and economic project.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> *El Líder*, May 2, 1948.

<sup>152</sup> Constitución, Art. 38 (Argentina).

<sup>153</sup> Oscar Yujnovsky, “Del Conventillo a la Villa Miseria” in Buenos Aires, Historia de Cuatro Siglos (Buenos Aires: 1983): 458.

In the introduction to his *Second Five Year Plan*, a comprehensive agenda for the goals of the administration from 1952-1957, Perón states that “the state and the people of a country, to make sure of their happiness and the country’s grandeur, have to determine harmoniously their social, economic, and political activities.”<sup>154</sup> Here Perón is connecting state productions to the well being of the masses - a sharp contrast from the Argentine workers in the early 20th century who were denied political citizenship while still forced to work in the nation’s agro-export economy. Under Perón, the central purpose of the state apparatuses was to provide for the working class, and in the same introduction, he states that “a government plan, to have a soul, must have a doctrine, since our national doctrine is...the soul of the workers.”<sup>155</sup> Planned government spatial productions that emphasized the working class created a built environment that reflected the imaginaries and aspirations of the new political regime and created a sense of confidence in Perón’s intentions amongst the working class: a letter to the government from a worker in Buenos Aires reads “it is important [to me] and noteworthy that the realization of these works is obeying a plan that is deliberately thought out and that considers the needs of the entire pueblo, especially the most poor.”<sup>156</sup> This emphasis on planning for the sake of the “people” took the spatial form of massive investments in public infrastructure and planned workers housing developments, which altered the landscapes of Buenos Aires and other cities throughout the nation.

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<sup>154</sup> Presidencia de La Nación, *2nd Plan Quinquenal* (Buenos Aires: Subsecretaría de Informaciones, 1953): 15.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>156</sup> Archivo General de La Nación, *Fondo Documental Secretaría Técnica*, Legajo 205, 11622.

### *Housing:*

In 1945, when he was still Secretary of Labor, General Perón professed his plans for the future of Argentine housing policy: “We strive for a country where there is a house for every family and a family for every house.”<sup>157</sup> The Perón administration made significant strides in ensuring adequate housing for working class Argentines, and it was one of the main focuses throughout Perón’s time as president. The second five year plan dedicates an entire twenty pages just to the issue of worker’s housing, stating:

The fundamental objective of the nation in the matter of housing will be to ensure to all the inhabitants of the country the possession of adequate housing: hygienic, comfortable, and economic. The dwelling in its condition of individual property has a social function to fulfill and for that reason... the State must be the guarantor of such.<sup>158</sup>

The implications of the national focus on housing most directly benefitted the working class. Previous administrations, adhering to liberal economic doctrine, had regarded the construction of housing as an issue for the market to resolve. By positioning housing as an integral right within the country, the administration directed the efforts towards those whom the market had let fall through the cracks, and explicitly stated that workers would receive priority in receiving public housing.<sup>159</sup> The 1948 “Ley de Propiedad Horizontal” established government subsidies for the private development of large, affordable apartment complexes,<sup>160</sup> in addition to the public housing developments overseen by the Ministry of the Interior: between 1946 and 1952, the national government constructed 6,500 public-housing units in the city of Buenos

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<sup>157</sup> Juan Domingo Perón, *Perónist Doctrine*. Edited by the Perónist Party (Buenos Aires, 1952).

<sup>158</sup> 2nd Plan Quinquenal, 133.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 141

<sup>160</sup> Yujnovsky, 460.

Aires alone.<sup>161</sup> These large scale housing projects, including Barrio Manuel Dorrego and the propagandistic Barrio 17 de Octubre, fundamentally altered the cityscape of Buenos Aires,<sup>162</sup> as their simple, modernist designs sharply contrasted with the ideals of Bourgeois aesthetic that had characterized the urban architecture of the past half century.



*Barrio Manuel Dorrego, 1950.  
Source: Argentina National Archives*

#### *Public Infrastructure/Industrial Investment:*

The historian Eduardo Elena claims that, amongst Perón's constituency, "progress was defined in terms of improvements to the built environment and local organizing."<sup>163</sup> Local politics and labor unions often measured the extent to which they were materially supported by the Perón administration through improvements to their local built environments, and the structure of the Peronist government as a hierarchy of appropriated labor groups<sup>164</sup> provided a

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>162</sup> Torre, 277.

<sup>163</sup> Elena, 98.

<sup>164</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *La imaginación técnica: sueños modernos de la cultura argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1992): 87.

channel for municipal requests for infrastructural updates. Communities in Buenos Aires' southern barrios received over 4 million dollars for road maintenance and construction, providing jobs and modernizing the area,<sup>165</sup> and the municipal subway opened the first line to run through the southern portion of the city in 1946,<sup>166</sup> providing easier access to the rest of the city for hundreds of thousands of workers.

Industrial investment was also crucial in the maintenance of a working class national identity. Between 1946 and 1952, 20,000 new industrial enterprises were developed throughout the country, and over 10,000 were located in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area.<sup>167</sup> The Perón administration's adherence to internal economic development created "a vast spectrum of textile, metallurgical, chemical, and mechanical factories [that] irreversibly reorganized the functioning of the economy"<sup>168</sup> to the benefit of wage workers. The new industries and the jobs they provided were heavily localized in the worker's barrios in the central and southern areas of the city.

Argentine historian Juan Carlos Torre describes the locations rather poetically, locating the new factories "in Almagro, surrounding the Supply Market; in Parque Patricios, which was the site of the Talleres Vasena; In Constitución and Barracas, with the spinning mills of wool, to the ports of la Boca and Avellaneda."<sup>169</sup> Torre's conjuring of the Talleres Vasena, where *La Semana Tragica* began, to describe one of the locations of Perón's industrial development pays homage to the working class struggle that facilitated the rise of the worker's state. Areas that had once been sites of repression from the bourgeois state were transformed into spaces of investment, conventillos owned by absentee landlords became apartments built specifically for workers by

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<sup>165</sup> AGN-MAT, Legajo 214, 17201.

<sup>166</sup> 2nd Plan Quinquenal, 246.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>168</sup> Torre, 277.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 278.

the state, and crowded, filthy streets transformed into modern roads maintained by comprehensive city services.

## Conclusion

“I believe in a public sphere that is controlled by workers, for workers,” Daniela explains, echoing the sentiments of a “working man’s Argentina” espoused by the Perón administration half a century prior. Daniela’s dream appears to have somewhat of a precedent in the history of the country: for many workers, the rise of Perón and the subsequent improvements to their material livelihoods was the first time they felt part of a national community.

This thesis has traced the forms of spatial resistance that facilitated the rise of Perón, from anarchism and labor organizing to state-implemented economic and social development. Argentine social movements, through their strategic use of urban space, exerted their grievances and demands to the liberal capitalist state while simultaneously producing alternative imaginaries of Argentine nationalism. Many of these demands, such as dignified housing and living wages, came to fruition under Perón.

However, the struggle for a just state and “the right to the city” for the most marginalized continues in Argentina, as it does throughout the world. The Perón administration was far from utopian and in many respects bordered on Fascistic: active political dissent was criminalized de facto, the media became a propaganda machine, and elections at all levels of government were rigged in favor of the Peronist party. By 1955, the tide of public opinion had turned against Perón and he was overthrown and forced into exile by another military coup.

The governments and military regimes that followed were susceptible to the same flows and meshes of power between the state and social movements, political society and civil society, and lived space and abstract space that characterized the struggle outlined in this thesis.

Beginning with the military dictatorship of the late 1970s, Argentina instituted neoliberal shock policies that harkened back to the free market, internationalist state formation that characterized the country a century earlier. And like the bourgeois Argentine state, the neoliberal state was met with sharp resistance as inequalities between the working and middle classes rose, culminating in the 2001 Crisis in which the Argentine popular sectors, true to form, violently occupied the Plaza de Mayo and other culturally symbolic spaces throughout Buenos Aires. Their militancy forced the resignation of the sitting president, Fernando De La Rúa, and after two short lived successors failed to meet the demands of the Argentine public, the Peronist Néstor Kirchner was elected president in 2003, ushering in a new era of redistributive economic policies and pro-working class political rhetoric.

Through all the iterations of these cycles, people like Daniela have been working tirelessly to push for more. Social movement actors in Buenos Aires continue to fight for the right to the city, like the Peronists and anarchists before them, in resourceful and creative ways. “I don’t know what [success] would appear like,” Daniela says. “Maybe we will always be struggling, and maybe that’s the purpose.” One thing she does know for sure, however, is that the next time she wants to express her political frustrations, she’s definitely going to paint a sign and cause a ruckus in the streets - and maybe occupy a park or two as well.



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## Appendix: Interview Information and Partial Transcripts

*Interview with Mercedes Di Virigilio, conducted November 3rd, 2015.*

*Partial Transcript:*

“Como definiría usted el derecho a la ciudad?”

M: El derecho a la ciudad tiene que ver, fundamentalmente, con los accesos a la ciudad y la posibilidad habitar la ciudad. Creo que esos son los dos dimensiones mas importantes....Por un lado, que existan, posibilidades efectivas, para el derecho a la ciudad, y además...que estas localizaciones y la asienta y la habitadad...sean realmente ciudades. Digamos que podemos garantizar una standard de vida y un acceso de servicios...uniforme para todos los habitantes.

“Que estudia usted que involucra el derecho a la ciudad? Puede darme ejemplos  
movilidad y habitat

Los déficits en relación a la disponibilidad de vivienda, la promoción de vivienda social, cuando los sectores menores ingresos elegir para vivir en la ciudad...no tienen los recursos por una vivienda digna.

“Cuales movimientos sociales conoce que enfocan en conceptos del derecho a la ciudad?”

Hay varios...en MOI, es un organización de territorialidad, que hace el derecho a la ciudad parte de su agenda, de las misiones de la organización. Hay un reinvicacion del derecho a la centralidad, derecho a la posibilidad, al dessarolar formas de vivienda popular en la centralidad, ehmmm....de la recuperación de áreas centrales por los sectores populares..es interesante también porque tienen un reinvicacion (¿??) del estética.

“Entonces, como transforma, el derecho a la ciudad en movimientos sociales...como informa el derecho en, por ejemplo, la lucha por justicia la vivienda, etc.”

Bueno...en el caso de MOI, ellos tienen todo acción, a producir y desarrollar vivienda de los ingresos en las clases bajos o medios bajos en el centro del ciudad.

Cuales son los conexiones entre de concepciones populares del derecho a la ciudad y movimientos sociales actuales (como MOI)?

Es un espacio mas colectivo, el nucleo de muchas organizaciones de hábitat. Es un espacio que reinvica el derecho a la ciudad, reorientar a influir en el desarrollado de normativas en particular que mandan....reinvica. (¿?)

2001: Eso es que pasó en 2001...la organización de algunos movimientos cuyas accesos a la ciudad estaban mas y mas cortado por el estado neoliberal.

*Interview with Maxo Velazquez, conducted on November 16th, 2015.*

*Partial Transcript:*

Bueno. Vos - como definirías vos el derecho a la ciudad? En terminas de que?

Maxo: En general, que buena pregunta no? Derecho a la ciudad, para mi, tiene un analysis siempre con dos componentes, como en dos dimensiones, por un lado tenemos lo que es el derecho a la ciudad en tanto cuerpo normativo que vaya revolucion en terminas del tiempo y que en ve incorporado derechos y obligaciones a los ciudadonos y basicamente el estado y a los proveedores del servicios publico general en respeto de que es un habitante de la ciudad, que tipo de accesibilidad, acceso no solo fisico, sino también económica, social, cultural, etc. Pueden ser los habitantes ha servicios basicos como infraestructura, energia, luz, gas, transporte, si? En terminas de un derecho normativo, lo que viene evolucionando de las concepciones liberales clásicas que hablamos sobre la libertad de movilizarse en un territorio e hasta cuestiones que tengan que ver mas con el lo que ven a un momento fue llama el derecho a la ciudad. Y desde los sesenta, son las posibilidades plena de equipara y de igualdad de las oportunidades de los habitantes, hasta policas mas recientes, que tienen, que tuvieron, principalmente con en principalmente en el empiezo de eismo que procuran focalizar con grupos particulares que tienen algún grado de problemáticas para acceder esto ya se porque son muy pobres lo que sea...y con políticas puntuales e especificas que tratan de beneficiar para su acceso.

Y de otro lado, esta lo que yo digo, la cuestión que tiene ver con las practicas, con las practicas cotidianas de los habitantes para procurar acceder esos subvienes ye efectiviamente a partir de protestas, a partir de, digamos, de situaciones de armado, con conflictos sociales logran poner emergencias en términos problemas. Como dos planos, que es bastante separados en Latin America, no están muy juntos. Supongamos en los ochenta y los noventa hubo una, digamos, una cuestión mas vinculado, mas practica de accesibilidad. A de términos grupos que salieron protestar porque algo no tenían, y eso grupo, por ejemplo un grupo muy vinculado a la problematica de la movilidad, tuvo que ver con los que [unclear] momento piquetero en algun momento que era cortar rutas para pedir demandas de algo. Si, multianamente esas ( interrupción) con lo cual, esas problemáticas que eran justamente cordón la ruta para algun beneficio lo que hacía se cortar el ruto porque permitir funcionar do...y entonces la via posibilidades de efectiviamente hablar en un tipo de algo, o en un tipo de un conversacion para buscar que, que sea normalicéis de interrupcion, que obvien, sean parada su situaciones a partir una ley, una realamentacion que permitir algo. Y obvion se retrotrajera una ley, una renanza, que haya tenido evidencia. Y esto era desde del cuestiones de gente que no tienen empleo que tiene perdién empleos e hasta problemáticas que ...se entonces las practicas en los ochenta hasta la crisis de 2001 y por hay un poco mas hasta 2003, 2004, esa idea de cortar la ruta para pedir algo. Me: Entonces crees que el gobierno es como una protagonista an la lucha para el derecho a la ciudad. Porque a veces, cuando estaba leyendo en la teoría original, dijo que el gobierno era una antagonista que no...muchas veces el gobierno crean condiciones malas para la ciudad. Es muy complicado, creo, pero que crees?

Hay muchas niveles porque si no piensa en la tradición en, en la historia del concepto del derecho a la ciudad, e en su primera emergencia, basicamente, emerge primeramente, claramente, es un derecho a la ciudad que emerge a partir de reclamo de sectores urbanos con los campesinos, que eran sectores opresiones que interpretaran la ciudad en este pedido muy recientemente.

Ningún estado se puede permitir mantener un conflicto mucho tiempo. Si entonces, algun tipo de recuerdo que hacerlo.

Bueno, cuales movimientos sociales conoces, especifico, que enfocan en conceptos del derecho a la ciudad? En la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Y como las organizaciones... como definan este derecho?

Maxo: Bien, hay, no hay tantas en la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Que tengan piso, que tengan piso, hoy por hoy peso. Mucha dejan fueron incorporados algunos movimientos politicos (el estado).

Me: Cuando estaban incorporado?

Maxo: Muchas empeezen incorpore para 2004, 2005, el Kirchnerismo logran meter varias estos representantes a dentre sufinas.

Muchos otros de estos...no hay tantos que allansio en general en 2001. Me vale en 2001 lo que es la recuperacion de algunos movimientos historicos que cambian su discusion en todo caso. Que agregan a sus ejer en discusion la crisis en particular. Pero la mayoría de lo que surgen en la Crisis 2001 es rapidamente saltivada, dos conomientos que surjen son corruptados muy rapidamente por las partidas politicas, principalmente con el Kircherismo. Como tambien, digamos, el 2001 lo que surge es una idea de que ciertas organizaciones sociales, como las que lucha, para el derecho a la ciudad, podían trabajar... es de bajo lema del poder de ser un estado dentro el estado. Puede gestionar la cosa publica que puede tener soluciones. Y entonces la claro en los movimientos que están vinculados la toma de tierras. Y la busca del ley espacio urbano. Muchos de ellos tienen la tradicion de ser, de haber tenido de personas que la dirigen o que la conducen vinculados con el movimiento cooperatista. Es fuerte tradicion en Argentina, con lo cual la idea de autogestion. De que el estado, digamos, no reprima en todo caso, o que el estado permita un espacio de negociación. Es algo que prima en esto grupo (MOI?). De que manera se servario como estas en las calles, quien es van a estar al cera de tal lugar de tal...un estado donde nos cemente. Autogestiva. Esto sean muy diferentamente que lugar de territorio. Los movimientos están muy vinculados a la acceso de tierra. Y, al acceso a la vivienda basicamente. Por lo tanto el derecho a la ciudad esta vinculado con la idea del acceso a la vivienda. Cosas que no son como así en muchas otras lugares del mundo. Donde el acceso a la ciudad es mucho mas que el acceso a la vivienda. Si acá, historicamente, se ha ido armando de este sentido. Y hay unas planteosos yo que vengo de la facultad de las ciencias sociales, del cual soy sociológico. Lo particular es cuando no ve los estudios urbanos, hay muchos vinculos a la vivienda y muy pocos vinculos otras cosas. Historicamente, el problema de la vivienda ha sido lo central en el urbano. Y efectivamente se ve en muchos movimientos ha surgido a la respeta. Por lo tanto en la emergencia de estos grupos, se mantiene función de lograr sus objetivos, y como en muchos casos los objetivos son efecviamente que logren tener un espacio terrortarial hay donde se logra se van locabo es prob le deicimo re tener influencia. Salvo que convierte en otra cosa. Entonces ya la lucha por el derecho es una lucha para total de lograrlo, y en momento dice lograr es el mismo realizacion que empieze con el Crisis. Porque bueno, ya no tiene su antagonismo y poco tienes en la fortaleza del pedido. del beljuntarse el objetivo en comun. Con lo cual estos movimientos hacer un paneo de todo los movimientos existentes algo muy complejo en este sentido. Aparece, desaparece, se sostienen. Si es interesante ver historias para ayudar se servirte, historias de personajes. De algunas personas que aparece en este movimiento. Y van a mandar una red, hay siempre redes de este diversas agrupaciones. Y esto son los que tienen verbo en la practica.

*Interview with Daniela Rodriguez, conducted on November 20, 2015.*

*Partial Transcript:*

Me: Porque sos un miembro de MOI? Tus razones personales?

Daniela: Bueno. Yo tengo 35 años y empece a militar en el año 1999 cuando empece la carrera historia, y el año siguiente me incorporé una organización barrial en la zona Hoy de la provincia de Buenos Aires. Y en el año 2006 conozco el MOI porque como buena hija de mi epoca la posibilidad acceder a la vivienda por mis propios medios era bastante inviable en ese contexto. Por lo tanto, con unos amigos decimos incorporarnos en el experiencia MOI,



que basicamente se caracteriza por la modela del cooperativos de vivienda hace 24 años. Me sumé la experiencia para forma parte de una cooperativa de vivienda pero terminé incorporando me como militante y educativo de la organización. A mi, lo que me parece interesante de la propuesta de MOI es que subiendo (?) a la luz de una necesitada tan básica como la vivienda fueron desarrollando en este 24 años, no solo una propuesta de vivienda sino una propuesta de habitacional integral. El MOI empezó peleando por la vivienda en los ochenta en el contexto de ocupaciones de familias de las zonas centrales de la ciudad de Buenos Aires y a partir de este experiencia empezó a desarrollar este noción del derecho a la ciudad y de habitat que bueno, obviamente tiene uno trayecto diga mucho mejor a la del MOI, pero en ese sentido en donde interviene la vision que hay sobre la ciudad, que por ejemplo la desarrollado de actividades propuestas que tienen que ver con la educación, con el trabajo, con el genero, con la comunicación, de una perspectiva autogestionaria. Que vuelve a poner al centro de protagonismo en los sectores populares y no en vanguardias o en, digamos, los modelos mas paritarios. Un movimiento que trabaja en la propuesta autogestionaria, que implica basicamente el empoderamiento que le forman el parte de la experiencia y el desarrollado (?). Aqui ya ahora, el tipo de ciudad y el tipo de sociedad en que queremos vivir en el futuro, que soñamos políticamente. Y esto es bien observable digamos por la forma que tenemos de construir, por ejemplo en mi caso particular que participó de una escuela popular que trata de cuestionar y de replantear cuestiones de la sistema educativa. Pero, tambien, en la cuestion de trabajo, nosotros tenemos una cooperativa de trabajo, donde tratamos de disolver la relaciones patron empleados, patron trabajador. Coji (?) otra forma mas democratica. El ema (?) de la organizacion por una ciudad sin expulsades y expulsados. Y eso bueno, fue algo que me atrapó y me entució sobre todo porque por mas que organizaciones existen que trabajan la vivienda y la habitat pero no se definen politicamente como organizaciones que pelean por el derecho a la ciudad, y el MOI lo hace claramente. Por mas que otras experiencias por acá, por ejemplo, hay un complejo de personal muy importante muy muy grande que un organizacion a los mana que es un movimiento territorial de liberacion. Esta organizacion no se define como un organización habitacional, sino territorial. Y no es exactamente lo mismo. Porque cuando nosotros nos definimos como un organización habitacional, estamos denunciando por ejemplo negocio movildario en la ciudadBuenos Aires. Politicamente tiene otra (can't hear) Definirse como organizacion que pelea por el derecho a la ciudad tiene que ver con una propuesta concrete material y tambien con una anuncia de las expulsion de la ciudad de Buenos Aires de los sectores populares urbanos.

Entonces, mencionaste, si, el derecho a la ciudad - como definirías, vos, el derecho a la ciudad? Que es el derecho a la ciudad por vos?

Daniela: Principio tiene que ver con convivir donde uno trabaja, estudia, va al hospital, va al cine, puede acceder servicios culturales y en general que propone la ciudad. Una ciudad que es una ciudad capitalista, por lo tanto expulsiva, una ciudad que hace 50 años que no crece significativamente la población, una ciudad donde que crecen la población viviendo en situaciones de enorme pecadera (?) habitacional. Entonces, así como la tierra es de que en la trabaja, la ciudad es de que en la habitar. Para mi, tiene que ver con recuperar el derecho a poder vivir donde uno quiere y de donde estan las posibilidades que el capitalismo por un lado te muestra y te acedes usualmente con poder tenerlas. Pero donde son realmente restrictivas. Tiene que ver tambien con la estsrategia que tienen los sectores populares para (?) su derecho a vivir dignamente. En nuestro pais, como en otros paises latino americas existe la experiencia de las villas emergencias como que son barrios ... muy precarios donde esta muy fuertemente estigmatizados. Hice si se siempre porque no van a vivir al otro lado. Al campo, a donde no están las posibilidades. El modelo de pais que nosotros tenemos en el siglo 19 es, bueno, decentrico. Y el, digamos, el ciento por ciento de las posibilidades que concentran en la ciudad. Y la gente vive, y busca vivir, donde puede trabajar. Hace unos años, pasamos por una tragedia (?) que fue yo tomaba el tren suburbano el tren que se llama una linea (?) que va a la ciudad al oeste de la provincia, y en un accidente terrible se murieron mas de cien personas. Esa cien personas viajaban como sardinas en la tadas en un tren porque en su lugares del donde viven no tienen la posibilidad del trabajo. Entonces la problemática urbana generalmente esta muy grave, y entonces el derecho a la ciudad tiene que ver con destruir todo eso y generar ciudades de como irse mi organizacion, no existan expulsadores no expulsados

(?), y basicamente pueden vivir las personas con la dignidad.

Tu definicion, tu idea, del derecho a la ciudad es mas o menos lo mismo de la idea del derecho a la ciudad que tiene MOI?

Si, claramente, nosotros digamos que el MOI tiene....hay...en una organizacion que tiene 24 años de existencia, por supuesto que causaron muchos cambios en la forma de ser, la forma de pensar y definirnos otra politicas. Siempre igual, a traves eso, es la cuestion de del derecho a la ciudad, son los originarios mismos cuando los compañeros fundaron la organizacion para trabajar en las ocupaciones. Pero hubo un antes y despues muy marcado entre, digamos, los fines de los noventa, el MOI nace los fines los ochenta, los primeros 10 años de construccion, se marca u avisara entre 99 y 2001, que generó muchos cambios en las politicas e concepciones de la organizaciones. Empezamos a cambiar nuestra forma de trabajo.

Porque?

Porque, al principio los primeros diez años la organizacion trabajan en ocupaciones, que quiere decir, los militantes, el equipo profesional tecnico interdisplicanrio, se sumaban las ocupaciones tratar a organizar las familias. A pelear la regulizacion de desocupacion, y empezara con viviendo (?). En ese contexto no habian ningun tipo del erramienta legal, financiera, que pudiera ayudarnos a consirvar las propuestas habitacionales. Y al fines do los noventa y elprincipio del 2001 el pais nuevamente vivía un crisis muy fuerte, que representó tambien en la habitacional. fue un momento de explosion de la poblacion hotelera. Nosotros aca en el Barrio Constitucion, es un barrio, como hace 100 años, es uno de los barrios con la mayor cantidad de poblacion vivienda en hoteles. (Rent hotels, cheap hotels where people live). La familia que no puede alquilar el apartamento, como, vive en un hotel. En el 2001, tambien explotó la cantidad de personas viviendo en hoteles...

Porque de la Crisis del 2001?

Buenos, por la Crisis economia, la destruccion de fuentes de trabajo, todo lo que pasamos con en el tema del coralito (?), la falta de plata. Aca en un momento, yo me recuerdo siempre, que se mitian billetes las porvinicas se mitian billetes propios y había plata de todos los colores...no había aboslutamente nada. Viviviamos haciendo trueque, trabjando en formas muy precarias, vendend por la calles cosas. Entonces que lo pasó muy mal. Pero, esa etapa coincidió con el subjumiento de la normativa dentro la ciudad de Buenos Aires que fuera nos posbilito acceder la credita muy muy flexibles para poder construir las cooperativas. Entonces, a parte de ese momento cambiamos nuestra forma de trabajo y dejamos trabajar en los ocupaciones y empezemos a trabajar en el alma del grupo cooperativas. Es lo que es la linea de formacion. Con esto refiera que nosotors difundimos y enfocamos en una person que tiene un problema habitacional, que quieren acceder a su vivienda propia, lo convocamos a participar del proceso del aramado, del cooperativas, de su degradacion de cooeprativas armas, es un processo de formacion desde nueve meses capicitamos a la personas, y compartimos el proyecto del organizacion y van diciendo que estos tipos de miya quieren llevar. porque la vida cooperativa no es una vida facil, de llevar adelante. Entonces en esos cambios de la historia tambien fuimos profundizan nuestras politicas con respeto a los que es el derecho a la ciudad. A la integralidad personal de habitat forma integral, y no piensa en solamente la vivienda. Porque la vivienda esta en un barrio, en un determino sector de esta ciudad. En ese barrio hay hopsitales hay escuelas que digamos, que otras cosas necessitamos para ser personas? Dessarolar forma integral donde se respeten los derechos como ciudadanos. Entonces empezó cambiar un poco la a profundarse...las concepciones del derecho a la ciudad. Pensarlo mucho mas integralmente.

Para vos, como cambió tu trabajo, tu papel en la organizacion, tu lucha, como cambió la crisis esas cosas, por MOI, por vos?

Basicamente lo que cambió eso es que te explicaba. La forma que construir, que digamos, que poder trabajar en

situaciones emergencias habitacional criticas, parece mentira porque (something) contra mano de historia. En el 2001, se había algo que pueda definir la epoca, la emergencia, la emergencia en todos los planos de la vida, educacional, laboral, la habitacional, pero nosotros en ese contexto, fuimos por profundizar la construccion a la algo plaza, y no trabajar con la situacion emergencia porque, como te decía, la incorporacion en un proceso cooperativo demanda del mucho tiempo, demanda termina condiciones materiales que tener en que te hablan las familias tambien las organizacion ante porque digamos, mas alla nostoros no trabajamos que situaciones emergencia, las compañeros que forman parte de la familia parte de la organizacion tienen diferentes situaciones economicas y sociales y laborales, y la organizacion esta desarrollando una estrategia para sostener esos procesos.

Lamentablemente nosotros tenemos peleamos una ley con una serie de organizaciones sociales de la ciudad de Buenos Aires. Una ley que en su letra puede parecer muy progresiva, en cuanto la posibilidad a acceder a creditos para la consturccion de las viviendas, de todo es una ley que tienen 10 años y que ha sido desde día 1 de financiada, muy acodiata (?) por los gobiernos de turno. Nosotros también del 2001 para acá en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, empezó a desarrollar su gobierno que tiene 8 años de existencia que representa lo peor de la derecha neoliberal un gobierno cuyo un modelo de ciudad de gestion tiene que ver con el modelo de la dictadura de la ultima dictadura militar, donde cacheto (?) de fue (unheard) (un estilo?) de mucha por la rama, pero bueno. Pero va a ... es que muy legado ese modelo de la dictadura esta muy legado con los que con los explosion de 2001, y esta muy ligado con el retorno de los noventa que pretendió este gobierno cada vez por la figura de Macri que ahora esta peleando la eleccion nacional, con la modelo de la dictadura, fuerte mente pulsivo de los sectores populares de la ciudad, muy de lo ciudad caracterizado por el negocio moviliario. Por fijate que la ciudad de Buenos Aires han tenido siempre un modelo de centre peripharia, no> Como los sectores populares cada vez mas dispulsados hacia a los suburbios de la ciudad. Hoy por hoy, estamos en una ciudad donde es suburbio en el sentido que todas las slias de la ciudad son aceptibles de negocios moviliarios, y demas es pulsion de los sectores de los popilares que se ven obligado muchas cosas a vivir en tipos habitacionales mucho mas precarios o a irse a la provincia de Buenos Aires. Entonces, en este sentido, un poco contra mano a la historia nosotoros eligimos un camino, ama la largo plazos, son la cooperativa, por ejemplo, Molino, lleva 12 años de existencia y todavía no esta terminada, no esta terminada mas que nada por cuestiones politicas que tienen que ver con el definicionato de la ley, con que nuestra propuesta autogestiva, implica que no alla bnun solo peso para la empresa moviliaria que quede mano por campo popular manejó los recursos, incluso la realizacion de la obra por la cooperativa del trabajo. Entonces, ha hecho muy dificil, e poder e sustoner nuestra porpuesta y seguida avanzando. En ese sentido, digamos, que donde veo quizas digamos, no es pan realizanoable con el contexto historico, porque digamos en al parte de 2001 tambien surgieron muchas experiencias que trabaja mas que nada sobre el emergente. Y nosotros decidimos un camino a mal largo plaza y la mayor profundeia (?) pero bueno, también parte de los cambios que podemos ver del 2001 para acá, cuando yo me incorporé la organizacion, el MOI empezó a nacionalizar su experiencia, MOI es un movimiento nacional que tiene experiencias cooperativas en diferentes niveles de desarrollado en varias provincias. Y en todas, mas allá de particularidades de cada una, lo que compartimos es este concepto estragetica al pelea del derecho a la ciudad.

